

Acts 24

- As we near the end of the book of Acts, today we move into the second of three sections describing Paul's years in captivity
 - Last week we studied the first section with Paul in Jerusalem under the control of the Roman commander for the cohort in Jerusalem
 - Paul was examined by the Romans unsuccessfully and later sent before his accusers, the Jewish council or Sanhedrin
 - Neither review resulted in a decision concerning Paul's guilt or innocence
 - And when a plot to kill Paul was uncovered, he was sent to Caesarea to stand trial by the Roman procurator, Felix
 - In fact, in looking back over the events in chapters 22-23, it's easy to see God at work in keeping Paul in custody
 - Paul was never accused of anything specific and no witness has come forward to make a credible accusation
 - The Romans were simply curious for why the Jews had rioted and attempted to kill Paul
 - The more sensible response would have been to consider Paul a victim rather than the suspect
 - So it seems clear that Paul is destined by God's hand to remain in Roman custody and to be escorted under their control to Rome
 - Paul could have made his way to Rome without the Roman escort,
 - But he wouldn't have had the same opportunity to reach the upper echelons of Roman authority
- As chapter 23 ended last week, Paul had arrived in Caesarea, before Felix the procurator for Judea
 - After Felix received Paul, he placed Paul in the Praetorium, a palace built by Herod the Great
 - Just as Paul had been housed in the Antonia Fortress palace in Jerusalem, here we see him housed in the palace for Caesarea

- Paul spoke of his time in this place briefly in the letter to the Philippians

[Phil. 1:12](#) ¶ Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,
[Phil. 1:13](#) so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,
[Phil. 1:14](#) and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

- Paul himself voices the two primary reasons that God has permitted his imprisonment
 - To encourage the brethren to greater courage to speak the word of God
 - And so that Paul's time spent in prison would open doors for Paul to preach to a part of Roman society that would otherwise never know the truth
- So the trial before Felix begins

[Acts 24:1](#) 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.

[Acts 24:2](#) 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,

[Acts 24:3](#) we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.

[Acts 24:4](#) "But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.

[Acts 24:5](#) "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.

[Acts 24:6](#) "And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law.

[Acts 24:7](#) "But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands,

[Acts 24:8](#) 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."

[Acts 24:9](#) The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.

- It required five days for the Jewish leaders to make their way to Caesarea on foot

- Paul had traveled on horse, so he made the trip in much less time
 - Ananias and some elders came with an attorney bearing a Greek name, meaning he was probably a Gentile
 - These proceedings would have been conducted according to Roman Law, and the Jewish leaders probably didn't understand Roman trial proceedings
 - So they hired a Gentile attorney to prosecute their case
- As Paul appears before Felix, the prosecutor lays out his case
 - In typical fashion, the attorney begins by ingratiating himself to the judge, Felix
 - The attorney acknowledges Felix's benevolent rule over Judea
 - In one sense this statement is false and intended to flatter Felix
 - Because Judea had experienced revolts and uprisings due to Jewish unwillingness to be ruled by Rome
 - There were also reports of Felix permitting bands of thieves to prey on road travelers and then demand a share of their proceeds
 - On the other hand, there was a general truth to the attorney's description of life under Felix
 - This time was part of the Pax Romana, a period of over 200 years of relative peace and prosperity throughout the empire
 - Judea was probably the least peaceful, though, second only to Britannia
- After the long-winded introduction, the attorney moves to the specific accusations against Paul
 - First, Paul was a pest
 - The Greek word for pest means plague or pestilence
 - Calling Paul a pest in that day was meant somewhat less metaphorically and more literally than it is today

- We say someone is a pest because they bother us
- The attorney meant Paul was a plague, a blight on the city and the nation of Israel
- His calls Paul a plague because he is causing dissension among all the Jews throughout the world
 - Dissension is the Greek word stasis, which literally means insurrection
 - So this accusation is carefully worded to catch the procurator's attention
 - Paul is now accused of inciting insurrection among Jews
 - This charge would have been particularly damaging if true, because Jews were so easily stirred to rebellion against Rome
 - And so the Romans were particularly reactive to such accusations
 - Besides the fact that the accusation was a lie, nevertheless it is quite a testimony to Paul's effectiveness as a minister of the Gospel
 - Paul has the reputation of reaching all the Jews and confronting them with the Gospel
- Notice also that the lawyer identifies Paul as the ringleader of a sect called the Nazarenes
 - The word sect suggests that Jews viewed Christians as a subgroup within Judaism
 - As such, they were hated for their unwillingness to be held accountable to Jewish authorities
- Finally, the prosecutor charges Paul with desecrating the Temple, though he never specifies how Paul did so
 - This charge was important because it explained the actions of the Jews in the Temple
 - Since Jews were permitted to kill anyone who desecrated the Temple, this charge became their excuse for rioting to kill Paul

- The attorney states that the Jews had lawfully arrested Paul, but this wasn't true
 - They were inciting violence against Paul without benefit of a trial
- Finally, the attorney levies a charge against the Roman commander
 - Tertullus intimates that the Roman commander had violated law when he intervened to stop the action of the Jews
 - Since Romans allowed the Jews to take action against offenders within the Temple, the attorney suggests that the commander had no jurisdiction to intervene
- Notice at this point that no proof has been offered for these accusations, and none will be offered since none exists
 - Instead, the attorney assures Felix that the proof will be found in an examination of Paul himself
 - And as Tertullus ended his presentation, the rest of the Jews who traveled from Jerusalem begin to chime in and agree with Tertullus
- Next it was Paul's turn to speak

[Acts 24:10](#) ¶ 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,

[Acts 24:11](#) since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

[Acts 24:12](#) "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.

[Acts 24:13](#) "Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me.

[Acts 24:14](#) "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;

[Acts 24:15](#) having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

[Acts 24:16](#) "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.

[Acts 24:17](#) "Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;

[Acts 24:18](#) in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were some Jews from Asia —

[Acts 24:19](#) who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me.

[Acts 24:20](#) "Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council,
[Acts 24:21](#) 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.'"

- Paul begins by declaring that he was happy to present his defense before someone who has been judging Israel for many years and understands their law
 - Paul begins his defense by pointing out he had only been in the city for twelve days
 - Hardly enough time to lead an effective revolt
 - And Paul points out they offered no proof in any case
 - Paul gives his true purpose in arriving in the city which was to worship
 - Paul does acknowledge one statement of the attorney, that Paul was a member of the Way, or Christianity
 - Paul could admit this simply because it was not (yet) a crime in Rome to be a Nazarene or Christian
 - But rather than being a sect or breakoff from Judaism, Paul testifies that Christianity was the fulfillment of all that Jews cherished and worshipped
 - Finally, Paul gets to the root of the real issue
 - He preached concerning the resurrection of Christ from the dead
 - Paul is saying that he is here simply because they didn't like to hear him preach concerning the truth of the Gospel
 - And Paul adds that the reality of resurrection was his main motivation to keep a clear conscience
 - Knowing that judgment was coming and wishing to have a good outcome at the judgment, Paul was always careful to obey God and law
 - Paul says the incident in the Temple was merely the result of their hatred of his message

- So when Paul came to worship, he brought no crowd meaning no Gentiles as he was accused
- Rather it was Jews from Asia instigated the riot
 - Yet they are not present to make their accusations
 - Under Roman law there were severe penalties for accusers who made charges and failed to appear at court
- So without the real accusers present, Paul challenges Ananias and the Elders to provide proof from their own inquisition in Jerusalem
 - Paul reminds them that he only spoke one phrase and nothing more was decided
- Felix chooses not to make a decision concerning Paul

[Acts 24:22](#) ¶ 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."

[Acts 24:23](#) 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.

[Acts 24:24](#) ¶ 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.

[Acts 24:25](#) 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."

[Acts 24:26](#) 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.

[Acts 24:27](#) But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

- Felix apparently had some understanding or experience with Christianity
 - The Greek phrase "a more exact knowledge" means an accurate or thoroughly understanding of Christianity
 - We don't know what he knew specifically, but Luke probably means that Felix knew enough to understand that the accusations weren't sound
 - Also, it seems to explain what happens next to Paul
 - Felix says that he waits for the commander to come and explain the situation

- But Felix never summons the commander, which suggests he was lying at this point
- Furthermore, Felix already had the letter from the commander that reported that Paul was not found to violate any Roman law
- Felix was merely making excuses for not rendering a decision
 - This allowed him time to listen to Paul and learn more about the faith Paul preached
 - And he hoped to make some money from Paul
- We can see this is true looking at Felix's actions over the next months and years
 - Felix doesn't seem to have ill will against Paul because Paul is granted considerable privileges in the meantime
 - And his wife, who was a Jewess, together with Felix began to hold court and listen to Paul's preaching
 - Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa who put James to death and imprisoned Peter
 - Felix had wooed her from a previous marriage, a scandalous thing even among Romans
 - Interestingly, the only son she bore to Felix was killed in the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79
 - It's been said that during these discussions enslaved royalty was addressing royal slaves
 - There was probably a curiosity factor and perhaps a sincere interest in the message
 - Paul preached concerning righteousness, self-control and judgment
 - These were the three elements that Jesus said would be preached in His absence under the influence of the Holy Spirit

[John 16:8](#) "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;

[John 16:9](#) concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;

[John 16:10](#) and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;

[John 16:11](#) and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

- Notice the response this preaching gained in Felix
 - He was clearly convicted and even frightened at the prospect of judgment
 - A man who had schemed, robbed, cheated, lusted, adulterated and any number of other sins must have understood his jeopardy
 - And yet he ran away from the truth and not toward it
 - Felix proves Paul's own words when he wrote in Romans

[Rom. 3:9](#) ¶ What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

[Rom. 3:10](#) as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

[Rom. 3:11](#) THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

[Rom. 3:12](#) ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

- Both Jew and Greek are under the charge of sin before God and that charge drives them away from His presence
 - It doesn't bring them into the light for the darkness of men's hearts cannot receive God by it's own power

[John 1:4](#) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

[John 1:5](#) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

- Felix has been exposed to the Light, but he cannot comprehend it, and the conviction drives him away in fear
 - Paul says it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance in Rom 2:4, and that kindness refers to God's grace to break through our dark hearts
 - Paul describes the moment when this happens for each of us in 2Cor

[2Cor. 4:6](#) For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

- Following this frightening incident, Felix continues to hold Paul hostage for two years hoping to extort money from Paul in exchange for his freedom
 - Along the way he continues to conduct conversations with Paul
 - We note that Paul never makes any such offer of money
 - Instead, Paul seems content to remain where God has placed him knowing he has this opportunity to preach to Felix and receive visitors
 - How might we react to this situation today?
 - Would we pay a bribe to leave a prison in a foreign land so we could get home and continue our lives?
 - Or would we see our circumstances as Paul did in this case?
 - Would we patiently allow our time in prison to become a witness opportunity
 - Understanding that God was in control and our time in such a place had been ordained for His glory?
 - That doesn't mean we wouldn't take every opportunity to leave, but only under the right conditions
 - And a bribe wasn't the right condition for Paul
- Finally, Luke says the two years ended when Felix was succeeded by Festus
 - Festus becomes Paul's antagonist in chapter 25
 - Felix was deposed by Nero around AD 60 after a fight broke out among Jews and Greeks in Caesarea
 - Felix's response was too harsh, and his soldiers killed many Jews in the process
 - The Jews complained formally to Nero, who responded by recalling Felix and installing Festus
 - What little we know of Festus is he ruled only a short time and died in office in AD 62

- Finally, Luke says that the reason Felix left Paul imprisoned when he was recalled to Rome was to win the Jewish favor
 - Apparently, Felix thought that leaving Paul in prison would gain the Jews approval
 - Since he was traveling to Nero, Felix thought perhaps this would cause the Jews to soften their complaint
 - Or at least he wouldn't be antagonizing them further

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