



## The Book of Acts - Chapter Twenty Four

### Summary of Chapter Twenty Four

Five days after Paul's arrival in Cæsarea, the high priest, Jewish elders, the lawyer Tertullus, and others arrived to bring charges against Paul in the court of Governor Felix. After an exhibition of servile compliance by the lawyer toward Felix, he laid three main charges against Paul: the first was that he was the cause of sedition across the whole city of Jerusalem, which was something the Roman's would take very seriously; and the second was being a ringleader of the Christian's, something that had been shown in other Roman courts not to contravene Roman law; and thirdly, bringing disrepute to the temple, of great importance to the Jewish nation but of little interest to their Roman occupiers.

Paul was then allowed to give his defence, which he was content to do in Cæsar's court as a Roman citizen, although it is likely he would have preferred it if he could have had a fair trial before the Sanhedrin, which was not possible due to their hard-heartedness in this matter. He again stood before the court and God with a clear conscience that he had performed his duties, both as a follower of Jesus and a Pharisaic Jew, to the best of his ability. He was easily able to refute the charges he faced; clearly stating they would have no proof to offer on any charge. He did, however, freely admit to the second charge as being a dedicated follower of Jesus, noting they referred to it as a sect, but that he determined it to be the fulfilment of the hope of Israel.

Paul was outlining his true reason for coming to Jerusalem after an absence of several years, explaining that his short time in the country made it impossible for him to raise sedition in the city. In fact, he had brought an offering for the poor, and had undergone purification rites in the temple, showing proper deference to the Jewish tradition in doing so. At this point he realised that the true accusers, the Asian Jews, were not in court and they should be the ones to lay these charges. He challenged the Jerusalem Jews to bring charges of their own, which they could not.

Felix was not persuaded by the Jews' case and dismissed the court. However, although Paul was clearly innocent, Felix did not release him but kept him under relatively relaxed imprisonment in Herod's Palace. He would call Paul from time to time to hear what he had to say, and Paul took these opportunities to fully proclaim the Gospel, which Felix heard with trepidation. The governor was also hopeful of receiving a bribe to secure Paul's release, which was never forthcoming, so Paul remained his prisoner for two years and was still in chains when Felix was relieved as governor by Porcius Festus.

## X Acts 24:1-26:32 - The Witness in Cæsarea

Imprisoned in Cæsarea for more than two years, Paul received formal hearings from governors Felix and Festus, and King Agrippa II. When Festus decided to take him to Jerusalem for trial, Paul appealed to appear before the emperor in Rome, which was his right as a Roman citizen.

### X.a Acts 24:1-27 - Paul's trial before Felix

The closest thing to an actual trial for Paul took place before Felix, when the Jewish contingent arrived from Jerusalem and brought their charges against him. Felix was not persuaded and he dismissed the court, but continued to hold Paul in custody, frequently conversing with him privately.

<sup>1</sup> Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Cæsarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.

#### Acts 24:1

The fact that it was only five days since Paul had left Jerusalem shows the haste and determination they had to prosecute Paul. The high priest neglected his duties in the temple to travel down in order to testify against a brother Jew in a Gentile court. The words of Malachi ring true once again: <<"So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law" >> (Malachi 2:9).

Ananias went down to Cæsarea. As previously stated, for the high priest to leave his duties in Jerusalem to travel down for the case shows just how much they hated and feared Paul, and all he stood for.

Tertullus the lawyer, Greek rhētōr, is considered to almost certainly have been a Gentile and a professional, brought in to add relevance and weight in a Roman court, and to formally present the charges levelled against Paul. They clearly believed this would win their case.

<sup>2</sup> When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation.

#### Acts 24:2

Tertullus began with flattering words designed to secure the goodwill of the governor.

We have enjoyed a long period of peace. His remarks had little resemblance to reality: Felix had the least peaceful term of any Roman administrator up until his time, was hated by the Jews, and was noted more for his bribe-taking than his benevolence.

Roman historian Tacitus (History 5) writes of Felix 'He used royal power with all the varieties of cruelty and lust'. He would be no friend to Paul, and kept him as a prisoner until his own time as Governor of Judæa had expired, although he regularly conversed with him both out of genuine interest in him and out of hope that Paul might bribe him for his release.

The reference to his royal power probably alludes to his heritage for, according to Tacitus, Felix descended from the Greek Kings of Arcadia.

Josephus says of Felix: 'He was a very bad man, who, depending upon his interest in the court, allowed himself in all manner of wickedness, was a great oppressor, very cruel and very covetous, patronising and protecting assassins' (Antiquities 20.162-165).

The last comment probably refers to the fact that Felix had had the high priest Jonathan assassinated, along with several other bystanders, some of them in the temple itself. His crime was he had spoken out against Felix for his oppression of the Jewish people, yet this high priest, Ananias, gave permission for and sanctioned the prosecuting counsellor to give high praise to Felix in an attempt to sway him toward their argument.

<sup>3</sup> Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. <sup>4</sup> But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

Acts 24:3-4

Most excellent Felix. Tertullus uses the same address for Felix as did Lysias in his recent letter (Acts 23:26), and Luke in addressing Theophilus in the introduction to his Gospel (Luke 1:3).

Not to weary you further. It seems Tertullus' obsequiousness was having little impact on Felix. Recognising this Tertullus moved swiftly on to outline the charges against Paul.

It is likely Luke provides only a brief outline of the prosecution's case as the beginning of v.4 suggests for, according to Tully, Roman lawyers were famed for lengthy orations of flattery, falsehood and satirical wit. Courtrooms in Roman times, much as they are today, seem to be more a place for theatrical drama than for justice and law!

<sup>5</sup> "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect <sup>6</sup> and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him.

Acts 24:5-6

Tertullus accused Paul of three crimes: stirring up riots, being a Christian ringleader, and profaning the temple (v.6). To a Roman the first charge would have been the most serious, amounting to a charge of sedition, threatening the Roman peace. The second charge Paul readily accepted (v.14), but the first and third he flatly denied (vv.12-13). The first charge against Paul was that he brought sedition to the land, a charge often brought against the OT prophets, e.g. by King Ahab: <<When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" >> (1 Kings 18:17), against the city of Jerusalem in general: <<I issued an order and a search was made, and it was found that this city has a long history of revolt against kings and has been a place of rebellion and sedition>> (Ezra 4:19), and against Jesus: <<But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judæa by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here" >> (Luke 23:5).

Paul was in fact a man of peace, who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ. He acknowledged there would be persecution and violent opposition, but that was against the followers of Jesus not by them. The idea that he was turning the Jews against Rome would no doubt have produced a wry smile on Felix' face, who knew only too well the animosity that the Jews had for the Romans, hence the need for such a strong military presence in this now desolate and relatively poor land. One of the reasons the Jews dismissed Jesus as the Messiah was that he had not tried to lead them in rebellion against Rome.

All over the world refers to parts of the Roman Empire and was clearly an exaggeration.

Nazarene sect. This was another name given to followers of Jesus of Nazareth and must not be confused with Nazirites, who were those who underwent the specific vows as stated in Numbers 6:1-21.

When Cyprian was condemned to die for being a Christian, this was inserted in his sentence, that he was the author and standard-bearer of a wicked cause. Now it was true that Paul was an active, leading man in propagating Christianity but he was a man of catholic charity.

Firstly, it was utterly false that this was a sect. He did not draw people to a party or private opinion, nor did he make his own opinions into their rules. True Christianity establishes that which is of common concern to all mankind, publishes goodwill to men, and reveals to us God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and therefore cannot be thought to take its rise from such narrow opinions and private interests as sects owe their origin to. True Christianity has a direct tendency to the uniting of mankind, and the gathering of them together in one body, that of Christ; and, as far as it obtains its just power and influence upon the minds of men, should make them mild, quiet, peaceable and loving, and every way easy, acceptable, and profitable to one another, and therefore, it is far from being a sect, which is supposed to lead to division and to sow discord. True Christianity aims at no worldly benefit or advantage for itself, and therefore must by no means be called a sect. Those that espouse a sect are governed in it by their secular interest, they aim at wealth and honour; but the true professors of Christianity are so far from this that they expose themselves thereby to the loss and ruin of all that is dear to them in this world.

Secondly, it is invidiously called the sect of the Nazarenes, by which Christ was represented as of Nazareth, from where no good thing was expected to arise: <<Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip>> (John 1:45-46); whereas Jesus was born in Bethlehem, where the Messiah was to be born: <<"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times">> (Micah 5:2). Yet he was pleased to call himself, Jesus of Nazareth: <<Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them)>> (John 18:4-5). And the scripture has put an honour on the name: <<and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene">> (Matthew 2:23). And therefore, although intended as a reproach, the Christians had no reason to be ashamed of sharing with their Lord in it.

Thirdly, it was false that Paul was the standard-bearer of this sect; for he did not draw people to himself, but to Christ; did not preach in his own name but Christ Jesus, and him crucified.

Desecrate the temple. The third charge was that of profaning the temple, a charge they could bring no witness evidence to corroborate and, in fact, Paul had spent each of the seven days he'd had in Jerusalem participating in purification rites, which would have been overseen by priests, who would not have carried out these duties had he in anyway been disrupting the temple, or speaking out against it. This was one of the crimes that Stephen had been charged with and which Paul had helped to condemn him of.

{{Verse 7 is not included in the NIV translation. The following is taken from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century KJV}}

{{<sup>7</sup> But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,}}

<sup>8</sup> By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.”

Acts 24:8

Learn the truth is something we read a lot about in the NT but it seems to be one thing that these people never achieved: <<To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” >> (John 8:31-32).

<sup>9</sup> The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

Acts 24:9

By asserting these things as true the Jews were breaking the ninth commandment: <<“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour>> (Exodus 20:16), as they knew them to be incorrect or at least exaggerated.

X.a.i Acts 24:10-21 - Paul’s third defence

Paul answered these charges by stating the facts of his business in Jerusalem. He had come to worship God in the temple and to bring alms to the poor of Judæa. These were not the actions or intentions of a man who would then do the things they claimed against him. In fact, the Asian Jews, who had first recognised him, were really concerned with what he had done in Ephesus and the surrounding parts of Asia, which the city clerk in Ephesus, when dismissing the crowd, had stated they should bring charges before the proconsul there if they had any but they did not (Acts 19:38). Paul realised that the charges brought against him were derived from this, so it should have been the Asian and not the Jerusalem Jews that were his accusers.

Paul proclaimed the true reason for their opposition to him; that is, his repeated belief and statements of his hope in the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked in the end times: <<For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned>> (John 5:26-29), which was also the message of the OT: <<Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt>> (Daniel 12:2). The resurrection was accepted by the Pharisees but rigorously opposed by the Sadducees, who now faced him in court, for the high priest was a Sadducee.

In summary, true believers shall rise by virtue of their union with Christ Jesus as their Lord; unbelievers shall rise by virtue of Christ’s dominion over them as their Judge, as devolved by the Father. Those who doubt this betray their ignorance of the Word of God, in terms of the word that God has spoken and the written scriptures, and of the power of God: <<Jesus replied, You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God>> (Matthew 22:29).

<sup>10</sup> When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defence.

#### Acts 24:10

Paul’s opening words are brief, factual and honest especially when compared to the flattery of Tertullus. Antonius Felix’ term had begun in AD52, making the number of years five to date with about two still to go.

<sup>11</sup> You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. <sup>12</sup> My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city.

#### Acts 24:11-12

Paul denied inciting any riots and twelve days was hardly sufficient time to muster a following. The twelve days were the five days from Paul’s arrest until the Jews had arrived for the trial and the seven days of purification he had spent in the temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, it was at most two weeks since his arrival in Jerusalem and less than three weeks since he had first landed in Caesarea on completion of his third missionary journey.

<sup>13</sup> And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.

<sup>14</sup> However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,

#### Acts 24:13-14

They cannot prove. They did not bring eye-witnesses with them and all they offered was hearsay and innuendo; these are not sufficient facts for a court of law.

Paul proceeded to show how, as a Christian, he was also a faithful Jew, accepting the Law and the Prophets, and sharing the resurrection hope that had been handed down through the promise of God as written in the OT scriptures.

<sup>15</sup> and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

#### Acts 24:15

That the resurrection will include both the righteous and the wicked implies a final judgment, see v.25.

Paul had never wished any harm against the Jewish nation or people, a subject he frequently wrote or spoke about, e.g. <<I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race>> (Romans 9:1-3). Therefore, it saddened him all the more when the leaders of his country were so opposed to him, for all he wanted was their salvation. Paul’s one true aim was to worship the God of his fathers in the way God required of all men, both Jew and Gentile.

<sup>16</sup> So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

## Acts 24:16

Paul reiterates his clear conscience, just as he had stated before the Sanhedrin the previous week (Acts 23:1).

Verse 16 is very similar to 2 Corinthians 8:21 <<For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men>>. He had brought his country alms from the churches in Greece and probably Asia, not the work of an enemy, but that of a loving friend. However, he found their response to be the way David had said: <<In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship>> (Psalm 109:4-5).

<sup>17</sup> “After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.

## Acts 24:17

Paul’s absence of several years on his third missionary journey included collecting the offerings of the churches to bring back to the poor in Jerusalem. Paul had this in mind from the outset, just as he related to the Galatians: <<James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognised the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do>> (Galatians 2:9-10).

<sup>18</sup> I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. <sup>19</sup> But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me.

## Acts 24:18-19

Paul had undergone his purification in Jerusalem (Acts 21:26) to ensure he was ceremonially clean, a requirement for a Jew if he wanted to worship in the inner temple.

Paul began to relate the events of his being captured in the temple (Acts 21:27-36), but cut himself short when he realised his accusers, the Jews from Asia, were not present. Roman law called for a face-to-face confrontation between the accusers and the accused.

<sup>20</sup> Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin – <sup>21</sup> unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

## Acts 24:20-21

When I stood before the Sanhedrin. Ananias and the elders were members of the Sanhedrin and thus could testify to Paul’s earlier hearing before them (Acts 23:1-10). The key issue both then and here, before Felix, was the resurrection – not just its concept but the realisation of the resurrection in Jesus.

## X.a.ii Acts 24:22-27 - Paul remains in custody

Felix was less than convinced by the Jews prosecution of Paul and, although he was clearly innocent and a victim of their bigotry, Felix decided to keep Paul in custody. Felix’ wife Drusilla could have told him that his duty as a judge was to: <<deliver them from the hand of the wicked>> (Psalm 82:4b). He had frequent private meetings with Paul, both because he

found what he had to say interesting, if frightening, and in the hope there might be some financial reward for Felix in releasing Paul.

<sup>22</sup> Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” <sup>23</sup> He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

#### Acts 24:22-23

Felix was well acquainted with the Way. The Way was fully discussed in comments on Acts 9:1-2. Felix had perhaps been informed of it by his Jewish wife Drusilla, see v.24, although the source of his, some say, substantial knowledge of the way is not clear. Cornelius had, of course, been a prominent convert almost 20 years previously but it is unlikely he was still a serving soldier in Judæa, although he may have left the army and settled there, but that is pure speculation.

When Lysias the commander comes. There is no mention that Paul was ever brought formally before Felix again, with or without the testimony of Lysias. However, it is unlikely that he could have added anything other than his own instinct that Paul was innocent.

But give him some freedom. Paul’s relaxed confinement may have been due to his being a Roman citizen, or the fact that Felix recognised something special about him, as the following verses partially indicate.

<sup>24</sup> Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus.

#### Acts 24:24

Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I, see comments on Acts 12:1, and the sister of King Agrippa II, who will appear in the account later, see Acts 25:13-26:32. Her marriage to Felix was something of a scandal because Felix deceptively precipitated her divorce from her first husband. She was likely no friend of Christians and had a bad reputation, for some say she lived with Felix before they married, and did so as his whore. But she was a Jewess and did apparently show an interest in the true faith as the perfection of her own belief in God.

<sup>25</sup> As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.”

#### Acts 24:25

Felix was afraid. Paul did not flatter this man who had the power of life and death over him, but proclaimed the Gospel boldly and clearly. The idea that he too would face the judgement to come clearly had an impact on him, and rightly so.

That’s enough for now. Although Felix was certainly dismayed to hear about the judgement of the wicked, for which he was certainly a prime candidate, he clearly didn’t listen or take the time to hear Paul tell him that he could repent of his ways and find forgiveness in Jesus.

In all the time that Paul was before his persecutors and before those who at least thought they had his life in their hands: <<“Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above>> (John 19:10-11a), he

remained calm and content, for it was not Paul that trembled with fear but Felix when he thought of the possibility of judgement to come.

<sup>26</sup> At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

#### Acts 24:26

Bribe, sent for him frequently. Roman law prohibited officials from taking bribes, but Josephus reports that bribe-taking by Felix and his court was rampant. His many meetings seem to be as much in hope that one of Paul's wealthy friends or one of the churches would come up with the money for his release.

Felix was a judge similar to the one in Jesus' parable: <<He said: In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men>> (Luke 18:2). Paul may have warned him: <<Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient>> (Ephesians 5:6), but that he could become part of a faith, where: <<It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age>> (Titus 2:12). Felix and Drusilla were perhaps such hardened and perverted sinners that Paul would never make any progress with them, yet he remained faithful to his calling and proclaimed the truth of Jesus as the Christ on each and every occasion he could. He never tried to buy his freedom from Felix but bided his time in prison waiting on God to move him on. In the meantime, he would speak to those whom he had access and to tell them we have this one life now but we need to prepare for the judgement that is coming; God will have his day.

Felix should have released Paul as he recognised, as his judge, that Paul was innocent. All commentators applaud Paul for not bribing the governor to seek his release, some applaud his friends for not doing so either but strangely some think it would be right to have done so, as Paul would have been more useful in the world teaching people everywhere the ways of God. Surely it was God's will for Paul to be able to demonstrate the Gospel was true, for those who were bound could still be free in Christ.

<sup>27</sup> When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favour to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

#### Acts 24:27

Felix seems to have recognised Paul's innocence. Tragically, he was more concerned about currying the favour of his constituents than administering justice. Therefore, he kept Paul in prison for another two years (AD57-59).

On his return to Rome, Felix was brought before Nero in disgrace, accused of using a dispute between the Jews and Syrians of Cæsarea as a pretext to slay and plunder the inhabitants, but through the intercession of his brother, the freedman Pallas, who had great influence with Emperor Nero, he escaped unpunished.