

## PAUL BEFORE FELIX

### TEXT: ACTS 24:1-27

#### INTRODUCTION:

1. Acts 23 ends in Caesarea with the Roman governor Felix telling Paul, "I will hear thee when thine accusers are also come" (23:35).
2. In Acts 24 we see Paul's accusers arrived at Caesarea (24:1).
3. I have divided my exposition into three parts: the accusation of the Jews, Paul's defense, and Felix's decision.

#### **I. THE ACCUSATION**

1. Ananias the high priest was the man who rudely commanded them that stood by Paul to smite him on the mouth (23:2). He took the trip down from Jerusalem to lead the elders in their case against Paul (24:1).
2. A certain orator (basically a lawyer) named Tertullus was brought along and he apparently did most of the talking (24:1, 2). "Tertullus" is a Roman name, and he may have been a Roman.
3. However, Roman names were common both among Greeks and Jews, so he was not necessarily a Roman. In 24:6, Tertullus refers to "our law," not "their law," suggesting he may have been a Jew.
4. Albert Barnes thought him a Roman, and said, "As the Jews were, to a great extent, ignorant of the Roman customs and laws, and of their mode of administering justice, it is not improbable that they were in the habit of employing Roman lawyers to plead their causes."
5. Tertullus' speech was loaded with flattery and falsehoods (24:2-8). His flattery was an attempt to smooth over the differences and disagreements Felix had with the Jews (24:2, 3).
6. *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* defines flattery as, "False praise; commendation bestowed for the purpose of gaining favor and influence, or to accomplish some purpose."
7. H. A. Ironside said, "to address him as 'most noble Felix' was in itself a misnomer. He was anything but noble. This governor was a most ungodly man, one whose whole life was a reproach to the high office he held" (*Acts*).
8. Tertullus' accusation was twofold: political and religious. He called Paul "a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition (a "rabble-rouser") among all the Jews throughout the world (the vast Roman Empire), and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes (24:5).

9. Tertullus accused Paul of stirring up and exciting the Jews to tumult and disorder. This was the political aspect of his accusation.
10. The religious aspect was profaning the temple (24:6; cf. 21:27-29).
11. Tertullus was a skillful manipulator of half-truths. He described the arrest of Paul as peaceful and lawful, and not as an act of mob violence (24:6, 7). Tertullus pretended that the mob would have judged Paul righteously, if the chief captain had not interfered; "but the truth was, that, without regard to law or justice, they would have murdered him on the spot" (Barnes).
12. Tertullus told Felix that Paul's interrogation was legally carried out by the high priests and elders in the interests of peace; and were it not for the unwarranted interference of Lysias, they would have dealt with the prisoner in their own courts and would have avoided this hearing with Felix (24:6-8). To this charge the Jews, who had accompanied Tertullus and Ananias to Caesarea, gave their assent (24:9).
13. It is interesting to compare the dishonest speech of Tertullus with the true account given in Acts 21:27-35 and with the letter written by the chief captain Claudius Lysias (23:26-30).

## **II. PAUL'S DEFENSE (24:10-21).**

1. Paul began his defense by "cheerfully" acknowledging Felix's experience as a judge, and his confidence in Felix's ability to give him a fair hearing (24:10).
2. Though Paul was courteous and polite, he was not a flatterer like Tertullus. The Bible condemns flattery. Proverbs 29:5 says, "A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet."
3. Paul denied the charges of sedition, explaining that he had only been in Jerusalem twelve days (and this would include the time he was a prisoner) and he was there to worship, not to stir up trouble (24:11). During such a short period of time it was very unlikely that Paul would have been able to start an insurrection.
4. Furthermore, while he was in Jerusalem, no one saw him in the temple disputing with any man, neither stirring up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city (24:12).
5. Paul's conduct in Jerusalem had been entirely peaceable, and his adversaries were wrong to say otherwise. Paul pointed out that none of them could prove their accusations (24:13).
6. Regarding Tertullus' claim that Paul was "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" (24:5), Paul did not use that terminology, but he "confessed" that he belonged to that way, i.e., he was a Christian who

- worshiped the God of his fathers, "believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (24:14).
7. Two thousand years later, Jews still consider Christianity a false "sect" (24:5) and "heresy" (24:14). Both these words are the same in the Greek, *hairesis*, and refer to a group that does not agree with the official belief or opinion of a particular religion, causing division or schism. Today the word "heresy" usually refers to doctrinal error.
  8. The term "the way" (24:14) is used several times by Luke in the book of Acts (cf. 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22).
  9. Though the Jews vehemently disagreed, Paul maintained that he was still worshipping the God of his fathers, believing all that was written in the law and the prophets (24:14).
  10. This belief involved the hope of the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15). Paul mentioned to Felix that "they (the Pharisees) themselves also allow" for the resurrection of the dead (24:15).
  11. Paul began his speech before the Sanhedrin by declaring that he lived in all good conscience before God (23:1). He said basically the same thing to Felix (24:16).
  12. In verses 17--21, Paul specifically deals with the accusation that he had profaned the temple (24:6). He said that his reason for coming up to Jerusalem was to bring to them "alms to my nation, and offerings," i.e., financial aid to his fellow Jews in a time of distress.
  13. It was wrong therefore, to claim that his purpose in coming was to profane the temple. Certain Jews from Asia Minor found Paul purified in the temple (cf. 21:27), "neither with multitude, nor with tumult" (24:18).
  14. In other words, in a quiet and peaceful manner. They found Paul quietly engaged in the sacred service of completing the observance of his vow (24:18).
  15. Paul justly complained that the very persons who alone could testify against him were absent, and showed that there was really no well-founded charge against him. They alone could testify as to anything that occurred in the temple; and as they were not present, that charge ought to be dismissed (24:19, 20).
  16. It was a "kangaroo court" where the principles of law and justice are disregarded or perverted.
  17. Paul told Felix that he had stood before the council, i.e. the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10), and called upon them to testify, if they could, of any "evil doing" in Paul (24:20).

18. "Except it be for this one voice" (24:21), or "one statement," refers to Paul's criticism of the high priest (23:3). This indicates Paul regretted saying it and that is why he apologized (23:4, 5).

### **III. FELIX'S DECISION (24:22-27).**

1. Felix had a more perfect knowledge of Christian doctrine than Paul's accusers had, and he decided to postpone the hearing of the case until Lysias the chief captain had come down from Jerusalem (24:22).
2. It is not clear why Felix postponed the hearing, since he probably knew Paul was innocent. Apparently he hoped to receive some money (a bribe) from Paul (24:26), and he also wanted to appease the Jews by keeping Paul detained as a prisoner (cf. 24:27).
3. Felix's instructions that Paul was to have as much freedom as possible indicate that he realized Paul was an innocent man being persecuted by fanatical and dishonest Jews (24:23).
4. And after certain days, Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ (24:24).
5. Paul "reasoned of righteousness" (24:25), but Felix's life was marked by unrighteousness -- violence, immorality, deceitfulness, etc. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, "His cruelty and licentiousness, coupled with his accessibility to bribes, led to a great increase of crime in Judaea."
6. Paul preached "temperance" (24:25), that is, self-control, but Felix was a man governed by his passions. "His wife Drusilla" was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I, the king who killed James.
7. This is that wicked Herod that was struck down by God and eaten of worms (Acts 12:1-4, 20-23). His daughter Drusilla had been married to the king of Emesa. Felix persuaded her to leave her husband and become his wife. She was Felix's third wife.
8. Paul warned Felix of the "judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (24:25).
9. Paul "laid it on the line" for Felix. There is a judgment to come.
10. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).
11. Amos the prophet preached, "prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12).
12. John the Baptist preached, "flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7).

13. The Lord Jesus preached, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5).
14. "Felix trembled" (24:25). He was terrified. But he procrastinated (24:25b). He probably never did get right with God.
15. Soon Felix moved on and Porcius Festus took his place (25:27). Felix had said he was going to wait till the chief captain Lysias arrived, but as far as we know, Lysias never did show up and Paul was kept a prisoner.
16. Two years passed, and Felix was willing to let Paul stay imprisoned "to shew the Jews a pleasure" (24:27).

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. Felix told Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (24:25). H.A. Ironside pointed out that for most people "a convenient season" never comes. They die in their sins and go straight to hell.
2. Ironside said, "People say, 'When I am old it will be time enough; after I have had my fling, after I have enjoyed the things of the world, then as an old man or woman I will turn to Christ.' Oh, the wretched hallucination that leads one to be so foolish as to speak like that! Think of the Lord of glory as a young man, in the very prime of life, dying for you. Yet you say to yourself 'After I have drunk the cup of sin to the full, I will give the dregs of my life to Him.' Could there be baser ingratitude than that? Old men seldom turn to Christ. When I was only twelve I went into a meeting in an auditorium in Los Angeles. About ten thousand people were gathered in the building which had two galleries—a building that has since been torn down to make way for another. I went to hear D. L. Moody preach. Because I could find no other place, I crawled out on a rafter beneath the ceiling. I remember how in the course of his address he said, 'I want everyone in this auditorium who is a Christian, who knows he is a Christian, to stand up. Now, remain standing until the ushers can tell me about how many are on their feet.' Then he said, 'There are between five and six thousand people standing. What a testimony—five to six thousand Christian people in this building! Now,' he said, 'I want everyone here who became a Christian before he was fifteen years of age to sit down.' And over half of that company sat down. Then he said, 'Now how many of those who remain standing accepted Christ before they were twenty?' More than half of those remaining sat down. And then he went on, moving up the years by tens. By the time he got to fifty,

there were only about twenty left standing in that great congregation who had trusted Christ after they were fifty years of age! It was an object lesson I have never forgotten" (*Acts*).

3. God says, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2).