



Paul on Trial Before Felix Acts 24:1-24:27 (Lesson #32)



To access missed lessons, lesson guides, and additional materials please visit our class website:

Eleven-point outline of Chapter 24:

- 1) Five days after Paul arrives at Caesarea the high priest, some Jewish elders, and Tertullus a Roman spokesman arrive to make formal charges against Paul (24:1).
- 2) Tertullus opened by praising Governor Felix for his oversight, foresight, and reforms (24:2-4).
- 3) Next Tertullus moved to making four charges against Paul (24:5-8).
- 4) Following Tertullus' charges the Jews presented joined in and affirmed the charges (24:9).
- 5) Paul then provides his defense (24:10-21).
- 6) Felix then cuts off the hearing and declares he will decide the case when Lysias comes down to Caesarea (24:22).
- 7) Further, Felix gives orders to the centurion to provide Paul some liberty and allow his friends to attend to his needs (24:23).
- 8) After some days Felix comes with his wife Drusilla and sends for Paul and listened to Paul speak about faith in Jesus Christ. Luke tells us that Paul preached primarily about three things; righteousness, self-control and the coming judgment (24:24-25a).
- 9) Felix was alarmed by Paul's preached and sent him away declaring he would hear him again when he had an opportunity (24:25b).
- 10) Next Luke tells us that Felix sent for Paul often, because he was hoping to receive a bribe from Paul to secure his release (24:26).
- 11) After two years Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. Rather than freeing Paul, to appease the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison (24:27).

I want to introduce you to the key players in today's text, up front, before we get started.

The first is the governor of Judea, a man in our text named **Felix**. His full name is **Marcus Antonius Felix**. He was, the Roman procurator, or governor of Judea from approximately **52-60 AD**. He held the same position as a person you are more familiar with, **Pontius Pilate**.

Felix held ultimate authority within this Roman province. Appointed directly by the Roman Emperor (**Claudius Caesar**), he served as a military governor, commanding Roman legions stationed in Judea.

Felix became the procurator based on the petition of his brother to Claudius. Felix was a former slave who by all accounts was a **cruel man**. His rule was marked by **internal feuds, disturbances, increased crime**, and a very **oppressive rule**. History tells us he was an **evil man**.

Felix was married three times. Today, when we encounter him, he is married to his **second wife**, a Jewish woman **named Drusilla**. By all accounts she was a very beautiful woman.

This was Drusilla's second marriage as well. History tells us she is **around 20 years old when we meet her today**. **Felix is around 45**.

So that you know a little bit more about Drusilla. She was the great Granddaughter of Herod the Great, the ruthless King of Judea who gave the order to kill the babies in Jerusalem. You remember Herod the Great also killed three of his own sons (**Antipater, Alexander, and Aristobulus**).

Drusilla was also the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. We ran into him in Acts 12. If you remember we read:

“About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.” (Acts 12:1–4, ESV).

Drusilla had one brother (Herod Agrippa II) and one sister (Bernice). We will meet up with them next week.

Finally, today you will meet a man named **Porcius Festus**. He was sent by Nero to replace Felix. He reigned as governor for a very short period of time (2-3 years).

24:1 Five days later Ananias the high priest came down with some elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. These men presented their case against Paul to the governor.

So, five days after Paul was rushed out of Jerusalem, five days later, Ananias the high priest came down with some elders of the Jews along with a lawyer named Tertullus.

Due to the distance, only a small number of those who stood to judge Paul are present at this meeting. It appears that Ananias is there representing the Sanhedrin and he is accompanied by some Jewish elders.

Also with them is a man named Tertullus, he is a Roman lawyer. He is only mentioned twice in the New Testament both times here.

We are told he is a **lawyer**. This Greek word **ῥήτωρ (rhetor)**, it is a **Hapax Legomenon**. It is only used here; it means a **trained speaker** or a **public orator**. Tertullus was a **professional speaker**, he was a **legal advocate**, hired by the Jews to speak on their behalf against Paul.

Notice Luke writes that **“these men”** presented their case against Paul. As you will see it appears that Tertullus is the main speaker, with the others only providing some back up commentary in the **sense of affirmations** of what **Tertullus charged**.

Now to remind you of who should be present but is not:

- 1) Those who made the false claim that started the whole riot (Act 21:27-29).
- 2) What about the forty conspirators who entered into an oath to take his life (Act 23:12-13).

In fact, we do not even have the entire Sanhedrin, only the high priest and a few Jewish elders. But it is this small group that travels over 100 miles to bring these **legal charges** against Paul before the Procurator (Felix).

Vs 2-3 - When Paul was called in, Tertullus began to accuse him and said, “We enjoy great peace because of you, and reforms are taking place for the benefit of this nation because of your foresight. ³ We acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with utmost gratitude.

When Paul was called in before Felix, Tertullus immediately began to accuse Paul. Tertullus opened his accusations by first **acknowledging Felix’s position of authority**, and even **stroking his pride**.

Notice he opens with two claims about Felix’s authority and leadership:

- 1) We (Jews, the nation of Israel) enjoy great peace because of you.

This seems benign enough, after all the role of government is to provide a peaceful environment where people and businesses can flourish. But it is actually not true and was nothing but flattery. The truth, because of Felix’s

misrule the Sicarii had risen up during his reign and for that very reason, he would be replaced by Festus in just two years from now.

2) Reforms are taking place for the benefit of this nation because of your foresight.

The claim, you are making changes that are benefitting the nation of Israel, this you are doing because of your great leadership skills and amazing foresight.

Tacitus (Roman historian) tells us that *“Felix was guilty of encouraging bands of thieves who would share what they stole with him.”*

The Bible Knowledge Commentary states: *“Felix was known for his violent use of repressive force and corrupt self-aggrandizement.”*

What Tertullus said was **flattery** and was nothing more than **an attempt to stroke Felix’s ego and win him over** to the Jews side. In verse 3, Tertullus says we acknowledge these things in every way and everywhere. **That is quite a statement, a false statement, but quite a statement!**

Vs 4 - But, so that I will not burden you any further, I request that you would be kind enough to give us a brief hearing.

Then, in a formal way, Tertullus wraps up his praising of Felix, recognizing that the governor only has so much time and you do not want to press your praising of his leadership to the point where he gets tired of hearing what you have to say.

So, he moves on to the request that Tertullus hear the charges the Sanhedrin have to make against Paul.

He asks Felix for a brief hearing. The Greek word translated brief is **συντόμως (suntomos)**, and it is a **Hapax legomenon**. It means **brief, concise**, something that consists of only a **few words**. **A brief hearing.**

Thus, Tertullus is asking Felix to hear a **brief summation** of the charges against Paul.

Vs 5-8 - For we have found this man to be a plague, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the Roman world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 He even tried to desecrate the temple, and so we apprehended him. 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to discern the truth about these charges we are bringing against him.”

This is the summation of the charges that Tertullus lays against Paul.

At this point, I am a little surprised, this is **indeed brief!** But it is not simply brief, as you will see it is **vague** and **lacks specificity**.

In fact, in the ESV, the charges are a total of **36 words**, if you included *“and so we apprehended him”* which is not really a charge, but it brings the total to **41 words**.

The overall charge breaks into **4 main charges**:

1) We have found this man to be a plague. WOW, this is a huge yet very vague charge!

The charge is that Paul is a **public menace**. He is a **plague**. **Grand statement, but what is the crime?**

- 2) **We have found this man to be an agitator** of the Jews who live in the Roman world. This too, is another big, howbeit vague charge.

What Tertullus is saying is that Paul is a **mover of insurrection** among all Jews throughout the Roman world. He is a **fomentor of riots**; the charge is that Paul stirs Jews into revolt everywhere he goes.

- 3) He is a **ringleader** of a **sect of the Nazarenes**. This is the third charge against Paul. This **charge** is interesting for a **few different reasons**:

FIRST, he calls Paul the “**ringleader**” the Greek word is **πρωτοστάτης (protostates)** it is a **hapax legomenon**. It is only used here and means the “**one who stands in front**” the **champion**, or the **leader**.

SECOND, Tertullus charges that Paul is the **head man** of a “**sect**.”

The Greek word translated sect is: **αἵρεσις (hairesis)**. This is where we get the English word **heresy**. But in the Greek, it literally means a group that holds a different opinion.

The **Sadducees** were called a sect (**Acts 5:17**). The **Pharisees** were called a sect (**Acts 15:5**).

Here, followers of Jesus, are called a “**sect**” by Tertullus. What is interesting is that even **the Jews saw Christianity as a sect of Judaism**.

THIRD, this sect was called the “**Nazarenes**.” Here we find another thing that followers of Jesus were called.

We have seen many different titles for followers of Jesus in the book of Acts:

- They had been called **disciples** (Acts 1:15).
- They had been called **believers** (Acts 5:14).
- They had been called **witnesses** (Acts 5:32).
- They had been called **brothers** (Acts 6:3).
- They had been called followers of **the Way** (Acts 9:2).
- They had been called **saints** (Acts 9:13).
- They are called **Christians** (Acts 11:26).
- Now in (Acts 24:5) members of a group known as **Nazarenes**.

Here we add to that list Nazarene. This was a title given to Jesus in the New Testament (Mat 2:23). Pilot wrote this inscription that he placed on the cross (Joh 19:19), and remember what Peter said his first sermon (Act 2:22).

As much as Jesus was referred to as Jesus of Nazareth, it appears that Jews started calling followers of Jesus, “Nazarenes.”

- 4) Here is **charge number four**, this man even tried to **desecrate the temple**.

This is the first charge that includes **some specificity**, although we must admit it too is **vague**, lacks real specificity, and **does not include any eyewitness accounts**.

The Greek word translated **desecrate** is only used twice in the New Testament, but it means to **profane** or to **desecrate**. To take something that is holy and soil it.

This charge is the single charge where the Sanhedrin had the authority to execute the death penalty. But this charge was not a Roman matter.

Tertullus adds: He was doing this when we laid hold of him.

Vs 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to discern the truth about these charges we are bringing against him.”

Tertullus concludes, his four charges, by saying, once you interrogate him, you will be able to discern the truthfulness of the charges we are laying against him. Rather than **bringing any eyewitnesses** to stand before the governor of Judea, Tertullus is hoping that when Felix questions Paul, he will **incriminate himself!**

Vs 9 The Jews also joined in the attack, alleging that these things were true.

At this point, the Jews present also joined in the attack, alleging that these things were true.

What is a little surprising is that they provide very little by way of specific charges and no eyewitness testimony.

Vs 10a When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied,

The case presented was very brief, lacked any eyewitness testimony and now Felix closes the prosecution's case. Felix then motioned (**literally in the Greek, he gave a nod**) for Paul to speak.

At this point **Paul provides his defense**. To provide some perspective Paul will be very brief in his defense. Paul's response, which begins in verse 11, will be comprised of **231 words** in the ESV. This is **6.5 times the charges**.

In summary, although Paul's **response was short**, it was 6 ½ times longer than the charges, which were surprisingly short, especially considering they hired a professional orator, and traveled over 100 miles to make them!

Vs 10b “Because I know you have been a judge of this nation for many years, I am glad to offer my defense in what concerns me

Paul opens, similar to Tertullus in acknowledging that Felix is the governor, but he in no way attempts to stroke his ego.

By this point, Felix has been the governor of Judea for **approximately 6 years**. Felix has indeed been judging the nation for “many years.” But notice Paul does not flatter him. He only acknowledges that he has been in charge for a while!

Next Paul provides his actual defense, which breaks into **11 responses**:

Vs 11 You can verify for yourself that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem.

- 1) **Vs 11** - You can verify yourself (if you had witnesses) but maybe these Jews here will verify that it was about 12 days ago that I went to Jerusalem to worship.

Paul seems to be referring to when he went into the temple, likely during the time of Pentecost, taking a vow (likely of a Nazarite).

Vs 12 They didn't find me arguing with anyone or causing a disturbance among the crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or anywhere in the city.

- 2) **Vs 12** - They did not find me disputing (arguing or verbally disagreeing publicly) with anyone, they did not find me stirring up the crowd (attempting to incite any type of trouble or bring about a riot), either in the temple, nor in their synagogues, nor in the city.

Paul outright denies the charge of sedition or stirring up a riot.

Vs 13 Neither can they prove the charges they are now making against me.

- 3) **Vs 13** – They cannot prove any of what they are bringing against me. These are baseless charges, that are not grounded or supported by facts, and they cannot prove them!

Although Paul does not mention that they brought no eyewitnesses, surely the governor recognizes they have brought nothing forward to prove these vague claims.

Vs 14 But I admit this to you: I worship the God of my ancestors according to the Way, which they call a sect, believing everything that is in accordance with the law and written in the prophets.

- 4) **Vs 14** - Then Paul makes a confession, according to “the Way” one of the many terms for Christianity we find in the book of Acts, according to “the Way”, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers (Yahweh).

Being a Nazarene, a sect of Judaism broke no laws. Further Paul states, I worship the true and living God, according to the way, which they call a sect. But I believe everything that is laid down by the law and the prophets.

I hold to the entire cannon of Old Testament, everything that the Pharisees hold as true, I too profess.

Vs 15 I have a hope in God, which these men themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection, both of the righteous and the unrighteous.

- 5) **Vs 15** - I have hope in God, which these men also accept, and I believe that **there will be a resurrection**, both of the **righteous and the unrighteous**.

All the men that were present would not have agreed on a coming resurrection of the just and the unjust, since the Sadducees would not have agreed to any resurrection.

But Paul states clearly that he believes everything written in the law and the prophets and he believes in a resurrection of the just and the unjust.

The New Testament declares this great truth in multiple places including (Joh 5:28-29).

Vs 16 I always strive to have a clear conscience toward God and men.

- 6) **Vs 16** – Next Paul says rather than sowing sedition, I strive, I endeavor, I labor, to have a clear conscience towards God and men.

Paul had said something very similar when he was before the Sanhedrin, when the high priest directed him to be punched in the mouth, remember (Acts 23:1).

He was not saying he was perfect or sinless, but he was saying that he endeavored to maintain a clear conscience before God.

This is very different than the charges that are being brought by Tertullus.

Vs 17 After many years, I came to bring charitable gifts and offerings to my people.

- 7) **Vs 17** - Paul then outlines to Felix, what brought him to Jerusalem in the first place. It was not to stir up or incite people. He came **bringing gifts and offerings for his fellow Jews**.

Paul wrote about this in multiple places including (Rom 15:25-28; I Cor 16:1-4).

Vs 18 While I was doing this, some Jews from Asia found me ritually purified in the temple, without a crowd and without any uproar.

- 8) **Vs 18** - While I was bringing gifts and offerings to those less fortunate in Jerusalem. It was during this time that I was in the temple, ritually purified.

He did not profane the temple in any way. He was not trying to stir up the people present. There was no crowd and there was no uproar! It was during this time that some Jews found Paul, there were not any crowds with him, he was not starting any type of uproar.

Vs 19 It is they who ought to be here before you to bring charges, if they have anything against me.

- 9) **Vs 19** - In fact, the ones who are saying otherwise should be here to bring charges, if they have any charge to make about my conduct during this time.

No doubt this point struck a chord with Felix. They had brought charges, **but where are the witnesses who are bringing these charges?**

Vs 20 Or let these men here state what wrongdoing they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin,

- 10) **Vs 20** - A subpoint of point 9. Let the high priest or the elders present state what wrongdoing they have found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin.

If you remember, Paul said very little and did even less when he stood before the Sanhedrin.

Vs 21 other than this one statement I shouted while standing among them, ‘Today I am on trial before you concerning the resurrection of the dead.’”

- 11) **Vs 21** - In fact, my time before the Sanhedrin was a big nothing except for the one statement I shouted while standing with them: ***Today I am on trial before you concerning the resurrection of the dead.***

At this point, one wonders what Felix is thinking. Like Lysias, Felix probably thought the Jews were crazy!

In summation, Paul admits guilt to one charge. He was indeed a Nazarene. But that was not criminal in any way.

As we complete Paul's response, what should catch our attention is how calm Paul appears to be while false accusations are being leveled against him.

APPLICATION: Paul is falsely accused by the Jewish leaders, yet he responds with **calmness, truth, and respect**. This should serve as a model of how we respond, even when wrongly attacked!

Vs 22 Since Felix was well informed about the Way, he adjourned the hearing, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case."

Felix was well informed, at least broadly speaking of **"the way"** and at this point he adjourned the hearing and said: *"When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case."*

Here is what is interesting. **As best we can tell, Felix never commanded Lysias to come to Caesarea.**

Why did Felix say this? We cannot be sure, but it seems like **he wanted to end the meeting**, but he **did not want to render a verdict**.

Equally, Felix had in his possession what Lysias had concluded, remember (Acts 23:26-30).

This may seem strange, but I believe you will see **why** he did this, which will also explain **why** he never commanded Lysias to come to Caesarea.

Vs 23 He ordered that the centurion keep Paul under guard, though he could have some freedom, and that he should not prevent any of his friends from meeting his needs.

Felix then ordered a centurion to keep Paul under guard, although he should be allowed some freedoms and the centurion should allow friends to visit and attend to Paul's needs.

Again, this only adds to how strange this all seems. It seems like Felix is keeping Paul for no reason, **but I believe you will see what is really going on.**

Vs 24 Several days later, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and listened to him on the subject of faith in Christ Jesus.

Several days later, Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. Then Felix sent for Paul and listened to him on the subject of **faith in Christ Jesus**.

Can you imagine this? **Paul the prisoner** is given an audience with the Roman governor and his wife to **talk about his faith in Jesus Christ**.

This audience would have likely never happened, had not this entire false arrest happened. Paul was provided the opportunity to speak to Felix and his wife (who is Jewish) about faith in Jesus Christ.

Consider, God is the one who has **orchestrated this whole event**.

APPLICATION: God sometimes uses what He hates to accomplish the good that He loves. When rough things come in our life, remember this biblical truth.

Vs 25a Now as he spoke about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come,

First, Luke tells us that Paul spoke to Felix on three topics; **righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come.**

We do not know what Paul said on these topics, but let's just imagine what he might have said. Knowing what we know about Paul, Felix, and Drusilla.

Righteousness: I imagine that Paul's discussion on righteousness broke into **three main heads:**

- 1) To inherit eternal life, we must be perfectly righteous.
- 2) Unfortunately, we are not, we have all sinned.
"10 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Ro 3:10-12 ESV)
- 3) Fortunately, God offers us His perfect righteousness when we place faith in his son.
"21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:" (Ro 3:21-22 ESV)

I suspect that Paul explained to Felix and Drusilla that the only way they would ever stand in God's heaven, was by placing faith in God's Son and receiving God's perfect righteousness.

Self-Control: Again, we do not know what he said. But we should expect that he called them out for their lack of self-control. Both Felix and Drusilla were previously married, and they had both scrapped their marriages to be together. In fact, history tells us that Felix courted Drusilla while she was married.

Paul warned them of the need for self-control. John the Baptist had said something similar to Herod Antipas.

Judgment to Come: Again, we do not know exactly what Paul said. But we would suspect that Paul reminded Felix that all men will one day stand before the judge.

Here is what Peter said when he preached to those in Cornelius' home:

"And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead." (Ac 10:42 ESV)

Peter had two big points: Judgment Day is coming, and Jesus has been appointed by the father as the Judge.

Paul said it this way as he wrote to the church in Thessalonica:

"7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed." (2Th 1:7-10 ESV)

But, Paul made it crystal clear to Felix and Drusilla that judgement day was coming and they would be required to give an account! We know he made it clear for we read next...

Vs 25b Felix became afraid and replied, "Leave for now, but when I have an opportunity I'll call for you."

Upon hearing **Paul's three-point sermon**, Luke records that Felix became **afraid**. Felix became **terrified**, Felix **trembled** under the preaching of Paul.

Then Felix responded, **under some level of conviction:** *“Leave for now, but when I have an opportunity I’ll call for you.”*

Despite standing before one of the most powerful men on the planet at the time, Paul boldly speaks about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment.

APPLICATION: We should not shy away from sharing the truth, even when it’s uncomfortable or risky. Speaking the truth with love can convict hearts.

Felix appears to be intrigued by Paul’s message, but delays making a decision, saying, When I find a convenient time, I will send for you.

APPLICATION: Delaying a response to God’s call can result in our hearts being hardened. Spiritual procrastination is dangerous—we should respond to God’s prompting today.

Rather than respond to the conviction, Felix pushed away the preacher under the false pretense of hearing him again when he had a better opportunity.

APPLICATION: If God is tugging at your heart, if you hear the convicting voice of God, do not delay, today is the day of salvation. You may never feel that tug again. As best we can tell Felix did not!

Vs 26 At the same time he was also hoping that Paul would offer him money. So he sent for him quite often and conversed with him.

Here I believe is the real issue. Felix had kept Paul imprisoned up to this point, Felix had never sent for Lysias, for he was hoping Paul would offer him money to be set free and then he would let Paul go.

I believe Felix knew that Paul had done nothing. But he likely thought since this man who was a leading spokesman for the way, he surely had access to large amounts of money, and so Felix would continue to send for Paul hoping that he would be offered money.

Notice the corrupting influence of greed. Felix hoped Paul would offer him a bribe, this shows how greed can cloud one’s judgment.

APPLICATION: Greed distorts justice and morality. A heart set on material gain is easily led astray.

Now, you may be wondering: **How long did this go on?** No need to wonder, Luke is going to tell us.

Vs 27 After two years had passed, Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, and because Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor, he left Paul in prison.

After two years had elapsed, this went on for two years, with Paul under a form of house arrest in Caesarea. After two years had passed Porcius Festus succeeded Felix.

The Luke tells us the reason, at this point, as Felix is headed out the door, he left Paul in prison, because he wanted to do the Jews a favor.

As we consider today’s lesson. Do not miss the largest point. In a situation that seems totally out of control, God is sovereignly in control. God had told Paul that he was going to Rome and indeed he will.

APPLICATION: Again, when we find ourselves in a difficult place, maybe a place we do not desire to be, look for the hand of God.