

ON TRIAL

Acts 24 / June 57 A.D.

As chapter 24 opens Paul has been a prisoner in Caesarea for five days. During that time the Roman Governor Felix awaited the arrival of the prosecution team from Jerusalem. That prosecution team included Ananias, the corrupt high priest, several members of the Sanhedrin and an attorney named Tertullus.

Luke gives almost equal space to charges against Paul, Paul's defense against those charges, and the response of Governor Felix. Luke is once again demonstrating that Christianity has done nothing to break the laws of Rome nor the religious code of Israel.

Once again, through Paul and the power of the Holy Spirit, we see that Christians can give calm testimony even in the most stressful of circumstances.

Acts 24:1-9 Tertullus for the Prosecution

In the custom of the day, Tertullus praised Governor Felix and promised to be brief. But what Tertullus said was laughable. During Felix's rule rebellions increased throughout Israel. His brutal reprisals stoked the hatred and resistance of the Jews against Felix. Most Jews would have expressed disdain for Felix and his administration.

Tertullus accused Paul of three offenses. First, he accused Paul of political sedition¹ inciting riots and threatening the *Pax Romana*². Second, he charged Paul with being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes". This is the only time in the New Testament Christians are described as "Nazarenes". Why Tertullus used this phrase is a mystery. It may have been a swipe that the movement was as backwards as the town of Nazareth from which Jesus came. Third, Tertullus accused Paul of attempting to defile the Temple in the Trophimus incident (21:29). In closing, Tertullus invited Felix to examine Paul personally, and affirm that all these charges were true.

Acts 24:10-21 Paul's Defense

Paul invited Felix to check out the facts. Only twelve days earlier he had gone to Jerusalem to worship at the feast, and virtually all of those days had been spent in Roman custody. When would he have had time to foment a rebellion? Where were the others who would have assisted in this worldwide terrorism? What kind of evidence did his accusers bring to this trial to substantiate their charges?

Having denied the charges brought against him, Paul established that this whole squabble was a religious, not a political issue. He admitted to several things quite precisely:

1. He worshiped the God of the Hebrews.
2. He was a follower of **the Way**.
3. He believed everything in the Law and the Prophets.
4. He had hope in God.
5. He believed in the resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

¹ conduct or speech inciting people to rebel against the authority of a state or monarch.

² the peace which existed between nationalities within the Roman Empire.

6. He worked hard to keep his conscience clear before God and man.

In a nutshell, Paul claimed to be a good Jew who practiced Jewish customs and believed in the Jewish hope of the resurrection. He had done nothing against Rome nor against Judaism.

Ironically, though Felix was a profane man, Luke tells us Felix had a rather clear understanding of Christianity which played in Paul's favor.

Acts 24:22-27 Felix with the Verdict

Felix didn't render a verdict but kept Paul in prison for two years, hoping for a bribe. With friends able to visit and provide for Paul, it gave Paul plenty of time to heal and to continue evangelizing northwest Israel and southern Lebanon.

Being arrested for being a Christian may happen in the future, but at this time it is a pretty remote possibility. But even so, we can learn from Paul's example about how to handle ourselves if we are persecuted or arrested for serving Jesus.

First, Paul defended himself. Paul's enemies were lying and falsely accusing Paul. Paul was innocent and argued for his innocence. We, too, should defend ourselves when we are innocent.

Second, Paul was innocent. Paul lived an upright, irreproachable life so that he could defend himself. We, too, should live righteous lives and not be guilty of breaking the law.

Third, Paul did not take the faithless shortcut offered him. He could have bought his freedom with a bribe paid to Felix.

Fourth, Paul took any and every opportunity to preach Christ.

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