

## 31. Paul's Defense before Felix: Acts 24

Acts 23 closed with Felix agreeing to hear Paul, after he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen from the important province of Cilicia. The hearing was to occur as soon as his accusers arrived. In the meantime, Paul received quarters in Herod's palace.

Acts 24 will tell of Paul's defense before Felix and Felix's response to it.

### ***Ananias and Some of the Jewish Elders Bring Charges***

Acts 24:1-4

*24 Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. 2 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. 3 Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. 4 But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.*

When Ananias and some of the elders arrived with a lawyer named Tertullus, they brought charges against Paul. Tertullus, by his name, was most likely Roman, and thus, an ideal person to bring their case before Felix a Roman governor. Tertullus is very courteous and complementary to Felix, signaling that he thinks this is a minor case and will not take much time.

Acts 24:5-9

*5 "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 6 and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him."*

*9 The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.*

The charges were fourfold according to Tertullus: Paul was a troublemaker; he stirred up riots among the Jews all over the world; he was a ringleader of the Nazarene sect; and he tried to desecrate the temple. It is interesting to note that Tertullus switched the burden of proof from him and the Jews to the governor: "By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges." Jurisprudence suggests that he who alleges must prove. Of equal interest in this passage is the use of the term, *Nazarene sect*. The Bible uses the term *Nazarene* four times – one time being in this present passage. In Matt 2:22-23, the word alludes the Old Testament prophecies – apparently lost now – which foretold that Christ would be called a Nazarene:

Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 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."

During Peter's time of denial, a servant girl spoke of his association with that Nazarene, Jesus, in Mark 14:66-68:

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

"You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

Later in Mark 16:6-7, one who was apparently an angel called the Lord, Jesus the Nazarene:

6 "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."

Although the references are few, by the time of Paul's defense the Jews looked upon the Christians as the sect of the Nazarene, indicating that they thought of the church as an extreme group of Jews. While one might say, "church of the Nazarene [Jesus Christ]", the term lacks the approval of direct scripture and apostolic example given to the name church [called out] of Christ. Jesus himself said in Matt 16:18: "18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build **my** church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Paul referred to all the local churches in Rom 16:16: "16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the **churches of Christ** send greetings." [Emphasis added]

Verse 14 in the following paragraphs makes clear the Paul rejects the thought that the church is a sect. The word Nazarene identifies a sect. Paul rejects the word Nazarene to describe the church.

### **Paul Makes His Defense before Felix**

Acts 24:10-16

*10 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 defense. 11 You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 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. 13 And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. 14 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, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.*

After answering the charges by stating that he did not argue with anyone nor stir up any crowd. He affirmed that he worships God of our fathers as a follower of the Way. The translators capitalized *way*, implying that it is a proper noun. *Way* here means way of obedience and living. The word appears twice in this chapter. In Acts 24:22, Luke shows Felix as knowledgeable about the Christian way of life: "22 Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings." The word *Way* also appears in Acts 19:9: "9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way." And again, in Acts 19:23: "23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way." Paul used the word in his defense in Acts 22:24: "4 I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison."

Vine defines *Way* as "the course followed and characterized by the followers of Christ, Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 24:22." (from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.) In his defense, Paul outlines a course that he followed where he believed the things agreed with the Law and were written in the Prophets, and that he has a hope in God that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

The idea that the wicked will be raised collides with the religious sects of today who believe that once the righteous and the wicked die that is the literal end of life for them:

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that a person is the soul the Bible speaks of, and when a person dies nothing lives on, the person is dead and is conscious of nothing. When the time comes for God to resurrect them from the dead He will create a new body for them from His memory. . . .

They totally deny the existence of the traditional Christian view of Hell. Satan is regarded as having created the concept of Hellfire in order to turn people against God. They believe that hell is the "common grave of mankind" where people go when they die. They are not conscious there. Unbelievers simply cease to exist at death. Believers remain in death until the resurrection.

[www.towerwatch.com/Witnesses/Beliefs/their\\_beliefs.htm](http://www.towerwatch.com/Witnesses/Beliefs/their_beliefs.htm)

Paul's final point was that he strove always to keep a clear conscience. Paul had made this strong point about his conscience in Act 23:1 in his defense before the Sanhedrin: "1 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." [Notes on Acts 23:1 discusses the meaning of the word *conscience*.]

Acts 24:17-21

*17 "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. 18 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. 19 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. 20 Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin – 21 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.'"*

Paul brings Felix up to date on what happened in Jerusalem when he arrived there just 12 days ago to worship [See Acts 24:11]. The gifts for the poor were the contributions from the churches on Paul's last missionary trip, which are discussed completely in 2 Cor 8 and 9. At the suggestion of James and the elders, Paul went through the purification rites at the temple. Paul asserts that he was not involved in any disturbance, but that it was some Jews from Asia, who had caused the uproar. Paul admitted shouting before the Sanhedrin: "It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today."

### ***Felix and Paul after the Proceedings***

Acts 24:22-23

*22 Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." 23 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.*

Felix who was well acquainted with the Way adjourned the proceedings, having decided to wait to hear the testimony of (Claudius) Lysias, the commander. Paul was not free completely, but he did have the right to have his needs taken care by his friends. According to verse 27, he was kept in this imprisoned state for two years.

Acts 24:24-26

*24 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. 25 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." 26 At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.*

Several days into Paul's imprisonment, Felix and his wife Drusilla came, sent for Paul, and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. Paul's discourse had three divisions:

righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. This discourse by Paul reflects to the teaching of Jesus in John 16:8-11:

8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

The two statements differ only on the elements of self-control and sin; however according to James in James 1:13-15, a lack of self-control leads to sin:

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Paul describes the acts of the sin and righteousness. Of sin, he teaches in Gal 5:19-21:

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Of righteousness, he teaches in Gal 5:22-26:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

The New Testament teaches the judgment of the resurrection of the righteous and the sinful in most every chapter. Remember, claiming the resurrection disturbed the Sadducees and resulted in the events leading up to this discussion with Felix and Drusilla. Paul had much to say in his letters about the judgment. In 2 Cor 5:10, he spoke of the certainty of judgment: "10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." In 2 Thess 1:6-10, he spoke graphically of the punishment of the judgment:

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

The writer of the Hebrew letter made the judgment just as certain as death in Heb 9:27-28

27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

One can only surmise what Paul said in this discourse, but it is certain that Felix listened and was afraid (some versions read, terrified). He was not so afraid as to be provoked to obey the gospel. No, Felix looked for a more convenient season. He was really looking for a bribe and

so much so that he called Paul to talk frequently. Felix compares to one of the people in the parable of the sower in Matt 13:22-23: "2 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."

The Lord taught us to shake the dust off our feet when people continually refuse the gospel. Matt 10:14-16 tells of his command to the disciples when he sent them on the limited commission:

14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. 15 I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. 16 I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

During his journeys, Paul repeatedly left the Jews when they refused to hear the gospel and turned to the Gentiles.

Of course, here Paul is the prisoner of Felix, and, therefore, he is at the command of Felix

### ***Paul Continues in Prison***

Acts 24:27

*27 When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.*

Felix was a man who sought his own advantage. He first wanted money from Paul, and now when he is leaving office, he grants a favor to the Jews in order to cozy up to them. Since he is a completely unprincipled man, he leaves Paul, an innocent man in prison.

The governor who succeeds Felix is Festus, before whom Paul will appear in Acts 25.