

## Thoughts on Acts Twenty-Four

If we consider the belief and traditions of the Jews who separated themselves from Gentiles as they would from lepers in the events of this chapter, we can better understand how much these men hated Paul. To be ordered to travel to a Gentile city, into a Roman palace, to appear before a Roman tribune must have been traumatic for the priest and Sanhedrin members. So, five days after Paul arrived in Caesarea, they also appeared, along with a Gentile lawyer, to plead their case in the Greco-Roman way. *"After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul"* (Acts 24:1). Tertullus fulfilled the duties of our modern prosecuting attorney. The writer Cicero says, "hiring a Roman lawyer was necessary since the Jews were not familiar with Roman legal procedure and it was the custom in the provinces" (Cicero *pro Cael* 30).

After all parties had assembled, Tertullus began his oration by flattering the governor. The lawyer's statement, *"We have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness"* (Acts 24:2-3), was fiction. Felix had directed the capture of robbers and conspirators, but historians indicate that he was a villain and a bad governor.

Tertullus listed the charges against Paul and indicated that the Roman commander had acted inappropriately. He called Paul a "real pest," and his words might have accused Paul of breaking the *Pax Roma* or "peace of Rome" when he said Paul was *"a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes"* (Acts 24:5). This charge was from the Jews in Asia and Macedonia. It also links back to the trial of Jesus before Pilate, where Jesus of Nazareth was charged with making himself King over Caesar. If the leader from Nazareth was put to death, His follower should also be. But the main charge from Jerusalem was the false accusation that Paul brought a Gentile into the forbidden parts of the temple.

Rome had given the temple guard and the elders the authority to arrest and execute any non-Jew crossing the barricade that separated the Gentile and Israelite portions of the temple area. Tertullus explained that the Jews had arrested Paul and were going to try him by their law when Claudius Lysias intervened. Notice how he insinuated that the Roman commander violated their right and Roman jurisdiction by removing Paul from them. *"But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ordering his accusers to come before you. By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him"* (Acts 24:7-8). The Jews from Jerusalem all indicated their agreement with the charges. The question is, "If the hearing was in Latin, did they understand all that was said?" It may have been a noisy, all-talking at once to show support for the lawyer.

Paul's response did not indicate that Felix was either good or bad but only that he was the judge of the nation Israel. He denied all charges, confessing only that he lived according to the gospel of Christ. Paul called it the Way, whereas the Jews called it a sect, Nazarenes, as if it were a division of Judaism like the Pharisees and Sadducees. Paul further confessed that he believed everything in the Law and Prophets concerning God and looked forward to the resurrection of all people, both good and evil (Acts 24:12-16). Paul explained that the only reason he was in Jerusalem was "to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings" (Acts 24:17). Paul told Felix that the ones that accused him were from Asia and were not present as they should be by Roman law.

Felix, faced with second-hand charges and an accusation against his commander, decided to wait for Lysias to come to Caesarea to continue (Acts 24:22). Paul was kept in custody, more like our house arrest, allowing for some freedom, and Paul's friends to care for him. Paul was almost like a house guest when Felix brought Drusilla to visit. Vincent writes, "Perhaps the mention of Drusilla as "his own wife" is to show that it was not a formal trial on this occasion." She left her husband Aziz in Emesa, Syria, to be with Felix. Drusilla was one of the three daughters of Herod Agrippa I. Her father murdered James, her great-uncle (Herod Antipas) executed John the Baptist, and her great-grandfather (Herod the Great) killed the babes of Bethlehem. With a family history like hers, many historians believed she was concerned about hearing Jesus' teachings from one of His apostles. But as Paul *"Was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you" (Acts 24:25).*

Felix kept Paul confined for two years, hoping that Paul or his friends would buy his release. They conversed often, but Felix never accepted the truth the gospel offered. Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus and left Paul imprisoned to please the Jews.