

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 24

PAUL BEFORE FELIX

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Even while Paul's fate is in the hands of his captors, he is not intimidated and shares his faith with any who will listen. Our responsibility is not to force people to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but to preach the gospel whenever the opportunity presents itself. In a world where there are no absolute "rights" and "wrongs," where acceptable lifestyles contrary to God's Word are promoted, we must not shrink back from sharing the gospel message.

PERSECUTION AND THE PLAYERS

Satan and religion will always bring persecution against those who study and live the Word of God in their daily lives. Paul recounts some of the opposition he has encountered in his walk with God.

Moses had the greatest message of the Old Testament, and just as he is the standard of the law and prophets, Paul is the standard of the New Testament. Both of these men had opposition from religion. Moses had opposition from two magicians in Pharaoh's court, leaders of the Egyptian religion. Paul is also withstood by two religious believers, Phygellus and Hermogenus (2 Timothy 1:15).

RESISTANCE OF RELIGION

Verse 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Verse 8 now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; Verse 9 but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as there's also was. The Man of God and the Word of God Verse 10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance, Verse 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra---what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Verse 12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. -- 2 Timothy 3:7-12

Verse 7 — Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge (epignosis) of the truth . . .

This passage from 2 Timothy gives a good description of religious people. They continually learn but never discover the truth.

Verse 8 -- Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood (opposed) Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith (the Word). . .

The story of Jannes and Jambres is recorded in Exodus 7 and 8. Their names are not given, but the Holy Spirit reveals them here. Religion always opposes grace. These people do not resist the person, but the truth, the Word of God. They came to a point where they could not and would not receive the truth. This is the point the Jews have come to in Jerusalem. Paul is being held by those whose minds have reached corruption and attitudes are reprobate. They can tell others what to do, but cannot do it themselves (1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 6:13).

Verse 9 -- But they shall proceed (advance) no further: for their folly (anoia: madness, insanity) shall be manifest (evident) unto all men, as theirs (Jannes and Jambres) also was.

Jerusalem's religious opposition will be brought into the light before believers and unbelievers alike. Their madness will be displayed, just as the opposition of Pharaoh's court was displayed to the whole world at the Red Sea. His madness is part of recorded history. Paul will list seven areas in verses 10 and 11, which Timothy has followed in Paul's ministry.

Verses 10-11; But thou hast fully known (parakoloutheo: followed closely, have understanding) my doctrine (teaching), manner of life (instruction by example), purpose (goals in the ministry), faith (lifestyle of faith), long-suffering (endurance), charity (agape: love, this is what makes everything else work in the Christian life), patience (steadfast during trials), Verse 11 Persecutions (diagmos: opposition by religion), afflictions (sufferings, beatings, attempted assassinations, stoning), which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured (stood up under): but out of them all the Lord delivered me. . .

God is faithful to deliver us from all opposition (Psalm 34:19).

Verse 12; Yea (furthermore), and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

You cannot study and live the Word of God without opposition coming from Satan. When you live the Word and become a doer of each promise, you become a primary target for Satan. Sickness, disease, and poverty are not mentioned. This opposition is from religious, legalistic people who oppose grace. Trouble comes from those who judge your food, clothes, personal life and actions.

MAIN CHARACTERS

In Acts 24 through 26, Paul will appear before several of the most prominent government figures in the Roman Empire: Phoenix, Festus, and Agrippa. These three chapters form one trial before three judges during two years in prison in Caesarea.

The ruler of Rome at this time is Claudius. He does not trust the aristocracy or senate of Rome and puts three former slaves in power, Felix, Narcissus, and Pallas. Phoenix and Pallas are brothers. Narcissus is running much of Rome with Pallas who is the lover of Claudius' wife. Claudius had two wives, Messalina was the first. She was famous for her promiscuity. She had a son by Claudius named Britannicus who never came to power. Because of her unfaithfulness,

Claudius ordered her execution. He then married Agrippina who had a son by a previous marriage named Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, nicknamed Nero. Nero was named heir over Britannicus. At that time Agrippina poisoned Claudius putting Nero in power. Pallas was having an affair with Agrippina.

When Felix came to power in Palestine, he met Herod's granddaughter, Drusilla, and fell in love with her. He persuaded her to run away with him and leave her husband. This offended the Jews and Arabs of Palestine because she was Jewish and Idumaeans.

Drusilla had a sister, Bernice, of whom she was jealous. Bernice was one of the most beautiful women in the ancient world. Drusilla and her son, Antonius Agrippa, died in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Pompeii.

Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod, the brother of Drusilla and Bernice, is now in power and will also hear Paul. Paul will give the gospel to all of these rulers and their wives.

PAUL BROUGHT BEFORE TERTULLUS (1)

Five days after being brought to Caesarea, a Roman lawyer named Tertullus informs the governor against Paul.

Act 24:1 Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.

And after five days Ananias the high priest descended (Jerusalem to Caesarea) with the elders (leaders of the Sanhedrin), and with a great orator named Tertullus (an eloquent lawyer), who informed the governor against Paul. The Sanhedrin is attempting to find some way to release the 40 men from their starvation vow and now hires a famous lawyer in an attempt to have Paul turned back over to the Jews. Tertullus is a Roman attorney. Even though the Jews hate the Romans, they will hire one to get to Paul. Religion hates grace even more than dictatorships. The Sanhedrin always sends Sadducees to bring Paul back because of the resurrection question Paul used in Acts 23, verses 6 through 9. Paul will again mention the resurrection while he stands before Felix, in verses 15 and 21.

All of this is accomplished by the Sanhedrin during the five days after Paul has been delivered to Caesarea. Ananias has been appointed high priest by the former procurator of Judea, Titus. He does not believe in God, but is strongly influential with the Romans. The Jews are upset with Titus for doing this, but now find it to their advantage. Felix is put in a position over this third class province for stealing from the Romans. He loves money and will later try to take a bribe from Paul for his freedom (verse 26).

TERTULLUS ACCUSES PAUL (2-9)

Tertullus accuses Paul of disturbing the peace by leading a faction against the Jews that would come against Rome. He accuses Paul of dividing a nation that supports Rome. However, Paul is

not the leader of a subversive organization. The evil organization is the one trying to get rid of him. The last act will be profaning the temple. Tertullus is also commending Felix for performing worthy deeds. This is not the truth because during this time Felix is extorting money from the people to add to his own fortune. He did this in Rome and is doing the same thing in Judea.

Act 24:2 And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: "Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight,

Act 24:3 we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

This is all flattery and lies.

Act 24:4 Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your **courtesy**, a few words from us.

In other words, "I could go on and on about your greatness, but give me just enough time for a few words."

24:4 courtesy, *epieikeia* (ep-ee-eye-ki-ah); Graciousness, gentleness, clemency, moderation, sweet reasonableness, mildness, fairness, kindness, forbearance, what is right or fitting. In 2 Corinthians 10:1, *epieikeia* is an attribute of God. Here it is an appeal to Felix to show the customary graciousness befitting his high office. Christians can display *epieikeia* in virtue of their divine calling.

Act 24:5 For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

For we have found this man (Paul) a pestilent fellow (a plague), and a mover of sedition (causer of riots) among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:

Paul is being called subversive and a ringleader of a group to overthrow the Jewish government. He is also accused of causing race riots. Felix does not know what a Nazarene is, but the lawyer is making this as full of intrigue as possible.

Act 24:6 He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law.

By profaning the temple, he broke both Jewish and Roman law. Rome protected the temple. If the Jews thought it was holy, then it was important to Rome and peace to protect it. Profaning the temple meant Paul was stealing from it. This is designed to anger Felix because he too is stealing from the Jewish treasuries and does not need competition.

The remainder of verse 6 and all of verse 7 is not found in the original, but does add to the story. Felix is setting before the man who holds the answer to his personal problems and those of the Roman Empire. Rome is on the verge of civil war and Paul has the answers: the gospel, the new birth, and the Word of God.

Act 24:7 But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands,

Act 24:8 commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him."

In other words, "If you examine Paul yourself, you will see we are correct."

Act 24:9 And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

PAUL'S DEFENSE TO FELIX (10-21)

According to Roman law, it is legal for Paul to answer the charges against him. Paul argues that he has been in prison for six of the twelve days since he arrived in Jerusalem. His point is that it would have been impossible for him to arrange a riot in that time frame. Paul claims his innocence, and God's Word will prove him to be truthful. There is no evidence against Paul. Paul states that the only valid accusation against him is his belief in the resurrection.

Act 24:10 Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself,

Tertullus has made a brilliant accusation with no evidence, and Paul will now depend on the Holy Spirit for his words (Luke 12:11-12). Felix still follows Roman law, which allows the defendant to answer. This law had not been implemented with Paul at Philippi (16:19-24). Paul will stay with the facts. He is familiar with Roman law and will not accuse the Jews without facts. He does not flatter with proof and will deny the charges and demand proof. Paul will not attack Felix's weak point (as Tertullus has), but his strong point of Roman justice.

Act 24:11 because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

Felix will never understand spiritually what Paul did, but he understands legally. It has only been twelve days since Paul arrived in Jerusalem and now stands before Felix. He has been in prison for six of those twelve days. It is impossible to organize a riot, lead a revolt, and profane the temple in such a short time. Paul also came to worship and was worshiping when he was attacked by the Jews. You cannot worship and simultaneously profane the temple.

Act 24:12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city.

There are two ways to profane the temple: either to rob it or argue inside of it. Paul states he has not done either one.

Act 24:13 Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.

Paul lays the burden of proof back on the Jews. They had put the burden on Paul in the beginning, now Paul gives it back according to the law. Those who begin the entire process were the Jews from Ephesus (21:27-28) who would have been arrested had they shown their faces before the Romans for their lack of legal cause. The witnesses the Jews need have not yet shown up. Paul gives a perfect defense, but will still be detained for two years. He mentions "money" (17), and Felix will keep Paul in an attempt to get a ransom from him (26).

Act 24:14 But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.

But this I confess (homologeo: promise) unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy (haireisis: discord, sect), so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:

In the early days, Christianity was called "the Way," according to the title Jesus used of Himself (John 14:6). Paul will now show that the Jews are the heretics and are guilty of their own accusations against Paul.

Act 24:15 I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

These Jews also accept the scriptures as final authority.

Act 24:16 This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

Paul says he is innocent and will now prove it. God's Word will vindicate him.

Act 24:17 "Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation,

Paul is not stealing money in Jerusalem as he has been accused of doing; he is bringing money, the Macedonian offering (Romans 15:24-28). Paul states his mission in Jerusalem is to bring money sent from the Macedonian believers to the saints.

When Paul reveals his innocence to Felix, he puts himself in a tough situation. He becomes a "hot potato." If Felix frees him, he will be in trouble with the Jews. If Felix condemns him, he will be in trouble with Rome. There is no evidence to convict Paul. Felix will decide to send Paul through a series of trials simply so someone else will accept the responsibility for Paul. This reveals the weakness of Felix's leadership.

Act 24:18 in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult.

Paul is saying, "Not even you, Felix, are over Asia." Paul is keeping Jewish law, not breaking the law. Paul is not in the presence of a large crowd, just four elders (21:23), so he can not have stirred a mob to incite a riot. Paul handles himself in a peaceful manner. In fact, it is the Jews who started the tumult.

Act 24:19 They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me.

Paul asserts, "My accusers who attacked me aren't even here to clarify the case. None of these men were part of the original crime. This is all hearsay." Under Roman law, Paul must have an eyewitness. Because there is no eyewitness to the accusations against Paul, there is no alternative. Paul must be found innocent under the law.

Act 24:20 Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council,

Or else let these (Jewish accusers) same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council (Sanhedrin),

These men will not produce a record of the previous trial. They have nothing but accusations against Paul; no evidence, only hatred for him. In the previous trial, the judges ended up arguing among themselves over the resurrection (25:6-7). Claudius Lysias, a Roman, was present and a witness of the entire beating.

Act 24:21 unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.' "

Paul is saying, "I am guilty of only one thing. I might be held in contempt of court in defending the resurrection of the dead." Roman law has nothing to say about the resurrection, and, at this point, Felix should have thrown the case out of court.

PAUL'S TRIAL COMES TO AN END (22-23)

After Felix hears Paul's defense, Felix places Paul under house arrest and forbids any of Paul's friends or family to visit him. He is held in prison for the next two years.

Act 24:22 But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case."

And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect (accurate) knowledge of that way (Christianity), he deferred them (adjourned), and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost (full extent) of your matter.

This is what the Jews did not want. Lysias would prove Paul's innocence. However, there is no record of Felix ever sending for Lysias. Felix sees an opportunity to get money from Paul or his friends, and so he illegally holds him for two years on technicalities. This trial ends in a stalemate for Paul, and God will have to work around Felix. Paul continues appealing to higher positions of authority before Roman magistrates.

Act 24:23 So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.

And he commanded a centurion to keep (tereo: to guard something which belongs to you, hold fast) Paul, and let him have liberty (minimum confinement under house arrest) and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

Felix thinks Paul is a good opportunity to get money and bolster his own political career, so he has Paul carefully guarded. Felix put Paul under house arrest with just one guard at the door. Felix allowed Paul's friends and relatives to visit him in hopes they would bring money to bribe Felix for Paul's release. During these two years, Paul will write Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, his most concentrated doctrinal epistles.

Nero Claudius Drusus, maternal great-grandfather of the Emperor Nero, came from two tribes producing Caesar's. One was Claudius; the other tribe was Julius. Nero Claudius Drusus was the younger brother of Tiberius. He married Antonia, the sister of Mark Antony and had three children, Germanicus, Claudius, and a daughter. Germanicus was poisoned. Claudius was considered dumb, but was quiet and studious. Claudius married Messalina, and later, after having Messalina executed, he married Agrippina. Agrippina's son by a previous marriage, Nero was adopted and became the heir under Claudius.

During his reign, Claudius freed three slaves, one of whom was Felix, who became procurator of Judea. At a party, Felix met Drusilla who was the wife of an Arabian king. She had a sister, Bernice, who was the wife of Herod Agrippa. These two sisters hated each other. (Later, at the time of this story, Bernice is living in incest with her son, Herod Agrippa II.) Felix persuaded Drusilla to run away and marry him. He threatened her husband, who is against Rome, and took Drusilla. Nero became Emperor when Agrippa poisoned Claudius and he also lived in incest with her.

FELIX CALLS FOR PAUL (24-27)

Felix comes to Caesarea with his wife, Drusilla, and asks to see Paul and hear him speak about his faith. Paul answers all of his questions, but in the end, Felix does not accept the Lord. Felix is eventually replaced by Festus, who calls another trial.

Act 24:24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

Felix is having a social gathering and invites Paul to speak of his faith.

Act 24:25 Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

And as he reasoned (dialegomai: discussed) of righteousness (new birth), temperance (holiness), and judgment to come, Felix trembled (was terrified), and answered, Go thy way (get out) for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

Paul answers the many questions Felix has for him, and gives him straight answers about the plan of God. Paul spends the day with Felix and Drusilla, and they are both convicted. Felix is full of fear over Paul's message but does not want to accept the Lord. This is all an excuse to procrastinate by getting Paul out of the house.

Act 24:26 Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.

Felix brought Paul in for occasional talks strictly to see if money had come. He had already made up his mind to reject the gospel.

Act 24:27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

Nero replaced Felix with Festus as the new procurator of Judea. He will not treat Paul as leniently as Felix did, but will put him in a dungeon and call for another trial. Felix, Drusilla, and her son moved to Pompeii and die in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. All of them had been presented an opportunity to accept the Lord, but rejected it.