

## Acts (Part Twenty-Four)

### Acts 24 Paul Uses Trials as Opportunities to Witness

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I am going to continue going through some small subjects that impact on some of the things that we are studying in the book of Acts. Today we are going to go through a small amount of what the Bible has to say about exercising your legal rights. We are involved in that section of Acts where Paul is defending himself before the Roman governors of Samaria and Judea. And though I cannot find any place that he actually called upon a counselor to help him, he did his own defending. Yet we are going to find out tonight that the Jews hired a counselor, apparently because the Romans had some sort of system that involved the use of lawyers as well. But Paul certainly did defend himself, and as we are going to find out later, why, he appealed all the way to Caesar to judge his case.

We are going to begin in I Corinthians 6, verses 1 through 6 where Paul rebuked the Corinthians for going to court to settle their differences. He says in verse 1,

**I Corinthians 6:1-2** Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

No record, as far as I know, has been left as to exactly how the saints judged, whether they actually had some sort of a system where there was a hearing before a minister and maybe also a small council of prominent people in the congregation who heard a case between two brothers, I do not know. There is no record of exactly how they did it, whether it was just done privately, with one or two ministers present hearing both sides of the case and then a decision made for or against. There is no record. But it is very clear that God expects that problems that arise between brothers in the church be settled within the church and not be taken out into the courts of the land.

**I Corinthians 6:3-6** Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? [Now, he means least esteemed those who are on the outside.] I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who is able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!

That is virtually all it says in regard to going to court, going to law, I guess you might say, against a brother. But very frequently, our problems, our disputes are not with a brother, they are with non-members, and they must be settled somewhere. And so it seems as though that they are going to have to be settled outside in the courts of the land.

Now, in Romans 13 is another very familiar section in regard to the governments of this world and the responsibilities and rights that God has given to them. And so we find here in verse 1,

**Romans 13:1** Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

So right from the ground level, you might say, from the local magistrate right on up through the city manager or the mayor and his council and the county and up on through the state and onto a federal level, that the Bible is showing that these people exist as a result of God giving them the authority to carry out the function of governing, managing society, and making sure that there is law and order.

**Romans 13:2-4** Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you

for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Now this means not only all of the law enforcement agencies, but it would also involve the courts as well. That they are there to avenge evil, to make sure that there is order in the land. Now, if there is no order, how are we going to preach the gospel? And if there is anarchy everywhere, there is not going to be enough peace to enable us to preach.

**Romans 13:5-7** Therefore you must be subject [and that means subject to court decisions, as we will see just a little bit later], not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake. [That is, conscience toward God because behind all of this is God's governance of His entire creation.] Because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Matters, then, involving the laws of this world are to be settled in the courts of this world. Now, it is not wrong, therefore, for us to use the laws of the land for our protection. That is what Paul did, as we are seeing. That he first appealed to Lysias and said, "You're letting them do this to me and I'm a Roman." He was invoking the law and sought the protection of the court, which at that time was represented by Lysias. Then when Lysias knew that he could not handle the situation, that he did not have enough authority for what Paul was involved in, he then took the case to Felix; and we will cover tonight. Felix just let the thing run its course without making a decision, handed it over to Festus, and Paul in front of Festus appealed to Caesar.

So Paul was using the law of the land in order to protect himself from just being ramrodded through with a decision that was going to be totally unfair.

Now, Jesus gave some wisdom regarding lawsuits. And in a way, it pretty closely patterns the things that we said last week about defending oneself. Let us go back to Matthew the 5th chapter.

**Matthew 5:25-26** "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly I say to you, you will by no means get out of there until you have paid the last penny."

This has to do with a situation in which you are wrong. Jesus does not mean that you have to cave in just because you have been sued. But if you have been sued and you are wrong and you have maybe mistreated someone financially, failed to pay a debt, or if you have injured somebody bodily, inflicted some kind of harm upon them, then Jesus is saying, the wise thing to do is to settle the issue as fairly as you possibly can before you are dragged into court and a judgment rendered against you. Now, I think most people just almost naturally recognize the wisdom of this. I think that insurance companies, by and large, try to settle things out of court before they get there because they know that it is very likely that the decision is not going to be in their favor.

Recently, I think you might recall the case that was won by the man against Rock Hudson's estate. What was it, a \$12 million settlement? Rock Hudson's estate is only worth \$6 million. There is a \$12 million settlement. And then in addition to that, there were several million dollars on top of that awarded to him for, I guess, punitive damages or something. I cannot remember exactly. Well, Rock Hudson is not around to defend himself, but I just give that as an illustration of the just awesome size of the awards that juries are making. It is almost ridiculous.

But I think what Jesus is pointing out here is very likely that if you get caught in that kind of a situation, you better try to settle out of court or it is very likely when it gets in the hands of a jury or a judge it is going to end up costing you more than if you would just humble yourself and do the settling out of court. Now, if it cannot be settled, you make the effort and you try to settle it. You make an offer and you feel it is a fair offer, a generous offer, and the person feels that that they are still being slighted and cheated and they are going to sue you anyway. Well, you have to defend yourself.

Now, there is reason to be fearful of such things. I just mentioned one of them. We are going to see in the apostle Paul's life some of the things that occurred to him as a result of this. And it is very interesting that there are a number of places in the Old Testament where God addresses this issue of the unjustness of the courts of men. I will just give you a couple of different places.

**Amos 2:6** "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals."

What He is referring to here is the bribing of the judge to win a case in court. Now this was going on in Israel anciently and I do not think that human nature has changed. There is certainly enough about unjust judges in our papers virtually every day.

Another case here in the book of Amos.

**Amos 5:10** "They hate the one who rebukes in the gate [that is where the trials were normally held in Israel, the city gate], and they have abhor the one who speaks uprightly."

If a person speaks righteously, he may be telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, but that is no guarantee that the court is going to look at it in that way. And God is kind of indicating here, at least in Israel at this time, that the court was not looking at things in the same way that those who were righteous were.

**Amos 5:12** For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: Afflicting the just and take bribes [still talking about the courts, and in actuality, what was happening is that the rich were hiring false witnesses to be on their side]; diverting the poor from justice at the gate.

Because he has no one to defend himself, he does not have any money. And I think that it is pretty well established fact in the United States now that those

who have the money to hire the richest or the best lawyers are the ones who are most likely to win, whether their case is just or not.

**Amos 5:13** Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for is an evil time.

It is kind of indicating that the best thing to do is wait for the judgment of God rather than appealing to the judgment of men, because their judgment is not very good. That is, if one can get away with that and keep stalling and stalling or something, so the thing does not come to an actual court case.

Please turn to Isaiah 59. This is probably the most complete denunciation of the courts of ancient Israel that exist in the entire Bible. And if there is a dualism, and there certainly is, I think that we can expect that things like this will be going on in the United States. I just received the latest issue of *Newsweek* magazine, and there is a half-page article of a man in Texas who in 1976 was convicted of a murder that he did not commit. Well, some newspaper reporter began to doubt some of the testimony that was given in this case, and he started doing some researching on his own, and he uncovered a tremendous amount of perjury that went on in the police department and the district attorney's office. Now those people's lives are getting strung out because of the revelation of their perjury. They were anxious to get a conviction, and they took a testimony from a notoriously corrupt criminal, you see. And here is this guy who has a perfect record in society, and they accuse him of shooting a policeman. Well, he had not done it, apparently.

**Isaiah 59:3-6** For your hands are defiled with blood [indicating murder], your fingers with iniquity [stealing]; your lips have spoken lies [slander], your tongue has muttered perversity [slanted testimony]. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies [just creating chaos in the courts]; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. They hatch vipers' eggs [he is talking about cleverly contrived cases] and weave the spider's web; he who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. [In other words, a decision

is reached, and that creates a worse situation.] Their webs will not become garments [it means that they will ultimately fail], nor will they cover themselves with their works; . . .

**Isaiah 59:8-9** The way of peace [a very famous scripture] they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; . . . Therefore justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us; we look for light [we look for peace and truth], but there is darkness!

There is a lack of deliverance from the social chaos that is being created by the justice system in the United States. I will add that United States, it was in Israel, and we can see it is occurring today. The police are fighting a losing battle against the ACLU and I would say at least a fairly liberal justice system.

**Isaiah 59:11** We all growl like bears, . . .

He is indicating low morality. Not morality in terms of right and wrong, but low morale. And I think that in the United States most citizens are cynical about getting justice in the courts.

**Isaiah 59:11** . . . and moans sadly like doves; we look for justice, but there is none; for salvation [or deliverance], but it is far from us.

**Isaiah 59:14-15** Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity [or fairness] cannot enter. So truth fails, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

Well, that is quite a statement from God regarding ancient Israel, and I think that we are coming to that place in the United States.

Now, let us go back to Matthew 5, this time we will go to verse 40. Let us say you do go to court and the suit goes against you, the judgment is against you. Now verse 40 covers this.

**Matthew 5:40** "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let them have your cloak also."

You do not give it up without a fight. He is talking here about the case has gone against you. And what He is mostly concerned here is about the attitude, and that is, we not only have to pay, but we have to do it in an unbegrudging attitude. We cannot have, let us say, the attitude of one involved in a hard-bitten quarrel, you know, an attitude of resistance. But rather, we are to guide ourselves by the law of love.

**Matthew 5:43-44** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies [you see, that guy who just took you to court and won his case], bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

I will tell you, that is one high ideal! You can imagine, you have just lost a million dollar case in court and we are supposed to have a good attitude. Well, that is what God says. That is a high standard.

I think that, by and large, church of God people are involved in far less court cases than the average citizen by far. And I think that it is a blessing that God extends to us. It is part of His protection of us. And I would say that normally, if we are obeying God, if we do get involved in some kind of altercation of some kind or another, it is very likely it is going to be able to be settled out of court.

God is concerned about our attitude, and I think if our attitude is reasonably good, why, He is going to move to enable us to be able to do that. I am not saying this is going to take place all the time. We certainly see with the apostle Paul that it did not. Jesus' case was not settled out of court and the judgment went against Him.

We can just string together (I will just do it to you verbally) Proverbs 1:7, Psalm 111:10, and James 1:5-7, where God offers wisdom and guidance to those who seek and obey. So if we are caught in that kind of a situation, certainly we should continue the seeking of God and try to obey Him to the best of our ability. And he tells us in,



**Proverbs 16:7** When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with Him.

So we should pray to God wholeheartedly for His help in resolving the difficulties as much as we can out of court. But if we do get drawn into that kind of a situation, continue to pray for His wisdom and ask Him for favor and ask Him to make our enemies even be at peace with us and to be able to take the judgment in a good attitude.

Let us go back to the book of Acts again and we will get to Acts 22 and take a running start here.

Acts 22 begins with the apostle Paul making his defense after being charged with creating a riot at the Temple. That is when he was completing that vow with those other four men and he was accused of taking a Gentile into the Temple and thus desecrating it. He was rescued by Lysias, the commander of the garrison there in Jerusalem. But even though he was rescued, he was also taken prisoner by him.

Well, Lysias tried to find out exactly what was going on at a very difficult time, and so chapter 22 opens up with Paul addressing the crowd of people that had rioted against him. And what he does, essentially, is show how he came to be in that position, how that he was a persecutor of the very Way that he was now a part of. But how that he had been met on the road to Damascus and blinded by an appearance of Jesus Christ that was brighter than the noonday sun. How he heard Christ speak to him, how others though who were with him did not hear anything except a noise. They were witness to the light, but they saw no form. And so the apostle Paul was converted as a result of that.

Then he goes into the meeting with Ananias there in the city of Damascus, how that Ananias laid hands on him and Paul's sight was restored, and then Paul began the preaching of the gospel, actually the preaching of Jesus we find more specifically.

Well, the crowd listened respectfully to Paul until, as I said last week, he mentioned the G word, Gentile—how that he had been sent to the Gentiles.

And when he did that, why, pandemonium broke loose and he was drowned out. Well Lysias decided that he wanted a decision here. He wanted to know a little bit more about the case and so he took Paul back into the barracks and was about to scourge him. And Paul then said to the centurion who was about to do that, to take care now because you are about to scourge a Roman who has had no charge made against him. Well, that put the man in fear, and he immediately went to Lysias and Lysias found himself quaking in his boots for what was ready to occur.

Then we went into chapter 23 and we find the apostle Paul now standing before the Sanhedrin and he is going to give answer to their charge against him. This is when the comic relief comes into the book of Acts and he says that he stands before these people in good conscience, and the high priest, Ananias, orders Paul to be struck. Well, nobody knows whether Paul actually knew that the man was the high priest. But Paul called him a whitewashed wall, which was nothing more than a colloquialism for saying that he was a hypocrite, for him to sit in judgment of Paul when he is commanding him to be struck. He was the man who was supposed to be the defender of the law and the upholder of the law, and the man who stood between the accused and a fair trial, and here he was ensuring that the apostle Paul was not going to have a fair trial.

So Paul apparently lost his cool, lost his temper. And when he was told the man was the high priest, he very quickly quoted Exodus 22:28, and said, "You shall not revile the ruler of your people." And then it says that Paul perceived that the group of men who were listening to him were part Pharisees and part Sadducees. So he said to them, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" And again pandemonium broke loose because the Pharisees believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees did not. And so they got to arguing amongst themselves.

Well, by the time that squabble was over, there was a small minority, it says in verse 9,

**Acts 23:9-10** And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." Now when

there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.

That is as far as we got the last time, so we are going to pick up now in verse 11.

**Acts 23:11** But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

You can recall from the last Bible studies that Paul was very concerned about what his reception was going to be like in Jerusalem and his worst fears were realized. Undoubtedly, he was despondent because of the things that occurred and he felt that the way things were going, that his hopes of ever preaching the gospel anywhere else were being dashed. And you know that he wanted to go back to the western Mediterranean. He wanted to go to Rome, and he wanted to use Rome as a stepping off place into even further areas, and he mentioned specifically that he wanted to go to Spain. Christ then appears to him and He tells him, you will get to Rome. Now that is a great deal of assurance. And not only that, He said there is a divine plan to get you there. So success, at least that far, is assured that he is going to get there.

But you see, there is a reason why he is going to get there. And all along the way, Paul now understands what his instructions are. All along the way, he is going to bear witness of Christ. Now you are going to see this as we go along, that he turns every trial into an opportunity to preach the gospel. That somehow or another he manages to, in his defense of himself, to turn it in that direction. So he undoubtedly was much encouraged.

**Acts 23:12** And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

You know, as I mentioned to you the last time, we just do not have, it seems, people like that unless they are skinheads. Maybe that was the equivalent of

today's skinheads. I do not know. I just happened to think of that. These undoubtedly were zealot-type individuals. And we find in verse 13,

**Acts 23:13-14** Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. [It does not say they cut their hair though.] They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing till we have killed Paul."

Boy, I will tell you, that is pretty brazen. Now, how about that for a solution from a people who were supposed to be *zealous* followers of the law. The sixth commandment which says, "You shall not commit murder." But I guess if you do it in the name of religion, all bets are off, and anything is fair. It is a weird way of thinking. But I am sure that an awful lot of injustice, even to the point of murder—and we know in the case of wars—have been fought as a result of differences in religious belief.

Now they vowed, you and I would think, that they would starve to death before they let this apostle Paul get away from them. But those Jews were pretty slick. Because they figured out four ways that you could break a vow like this. They *always* had a way out. There was always a back door that you could get out, just in case. Now I am going to give you the four ways that you could get out of a vow.

1. You could always break a vow if it was a vow of incitement. In other words, you were incited to make this because circumstances had conspired against you and they got you all excited. "I vow to do this." And then when cooler heads prevailed. "Well, I break that vow. I did it while I was incited."
2. You could also get out of vows of exaggeration. If afterward you realize that you really exaggerated what you said (and I do not know whether you had to go to the priest or not), but you were allowed to get out of that.
3. And then vows that were made in error. You vowed something and then you later found out that what you vowed about, or the reason you vowed this thing that you vowed about was not true and therefore you were able to get out of it.

4. Vows that could not be kept by reason of constraint. I do not know exactly what that means. But I think it means that after you made the vow, some other event, person, forced you to do something else. And you could get out of that kind of a vow as well. In other words, you were under constraint from something else.

Now, you can understand after looking at these things why Jesus said, let your yes be yes and your no, no. Why He said, Watch what you utter before the king, because somebody may tell him what you said. Be careful about the words that come out of your mouth, because God may hold you to them. And it is just best to think things through before you utter something like this. Because if you utter something in this kind of incitement or exaggeration or error or by reason of constraint, then all it does is, at the very least, it makes you look silly. It makes you look untrustworthy. It makes you look irresponsible. And I think we can say it not only makes you look that way, we probably would be that way. So the best thing to do is to just keep your mouth shut until you have been able to qualify anything well enough so that when you do speak, you really do understand what you are making a vow about. I.e. marriage or whatever it might be that is a vow.

**Acts 23:15** [Now here is their idea. And I will tell you, it was really dumb. But it was their idea nonetheless.] "Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander [that is, Lysias] that he [Paul] be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

In short, what they were saying to do was, if you can get him out of the barracks, we will kill him between the time that he leaves the barracks and the time he comes in to have his case tried before you (or his hearing, or whatever you want to call it).

Now, how in the world did they ever expect to get away with that? Did they think that Lysias was so dumb that he would fall for a trick like that? They probably did in their excitement. Did they think somehow that they were going to overthrow experienced veterans of Roman legions who were going to be well armed, who were also going to be in their fighting regalia? Not only that, they made another serious mistake.

**Acts 23:16** So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

How in the world did that thing get to Paul's sister's son? From the context here, we are going to find out that it sounds as though he was just a boy. I will tell you what the clue is. How in the world did a young boy find out about this? They must have been talking all over Jerusalem. "We're going to get him and this is how we are going to do it." so that even a boy would hear it. Now do you not think that if they are operating a conspiracy, they would keep the number of people that were involved in the conspiracy down to as small a number as you possibly could keep it? But it sounds as though it was kind of noised around some of the families.

**Acts 23:16-19** Then Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him." And he took him and brought him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you." And then the commander took him by the hand. . .

Now that is the indication that he was just a young boy. You do not take young men, or even teenagers by the hand. You take young boys by the hand. Now, especially whenever you are probably dealing with a hardened soldier, would not a hardened soldier, the commander, be most likely to treat a teenager, an older teenager, more like a man? He probably would. But now on the other hand, he might have some tender feelings toward a boy, somebody 8-9 years old or whatever.

So why was a boy listening in on the conspiracy that was going on? Well, somebody was doing too much talking. The walls had ears. And we can always say that, well, God made sure that he heard it. Certainly we can say that. But certainly, I think, it also indicates that they were awfully dumb in their planning.

**Acts 23:19-23** Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring

Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though he was going to inquire more fully about him. But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you." So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me." Then he [this Lysias] called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen [I will add them all up. That is 470 men to transport one prisoner. That is a lot of men for one man.] to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; . . .

If he was giving Roman time, the way the Romans told time, this would have been 3 a.m. In other words, they would leave the barracks there at 3 a.m. and head out through Jerusalem before anybody else was up, and be out of the city by the time anybody else was up and stirring around.

Now that 470 men, according to the records that are available, represented almost half of the contingent of the Roman army that was there in Jerusalem, usually about a cohort, roughly about 1,000 men.

**Acts 23:24** . . . and provide mounts to set Paul on, and to bring him safely to Felix the governor.

We will get the Felix just a little bit later, and I will give you some information about him. He was a very interesting character and had quite a background.

Lysias wrote this letter. This was going to go to Felix. I might say here that it is highly unlikely that that Luke actually saw the exact letter. But certainly from the charges that were made and from what he was able to see he would have a pretty good idea what was in the letter.

It is a typical letter, according to the commentaries, the kind that would go back and forth between government officials.

**Acts 23:26-29** Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings. This man [Paul] was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him worthy of death or chains.

Lysias was able to perceive, despite all the tumult, that the charge against Paul was really a religious charge, a theological charge.

**Acts 23:30** And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

Now it is very likely that what he would have done was give Paul safe passage outside of Jerusalem and set him free—because there was no case. But when the conspiracy against Paul was made, it made him suspicious that maybe there was something to the charge of sedition that the Jews were making against Paul. That is, of creating dissension against Rome. Therefore, it undoubtedly altered Lysias' decision. Now he felt bound to make sure that Paul had safe passage to Caesarea where Felix was, in order that, first of all, he be protected as a Roman and secondly, that this thing, this question about sedition might be looked into a little bit further. But as of right now, from what Luke has recorded in this letter, he had nothing charged against him worthy of death or chains, that is, he should not have even been imprisoned.

You can see this case is taking interesting twists and turns, and things are happening in order to ensure that Paul is going to make a witness right up the chain of command, all the way to the emperor.

Now you have got to think about these things because the same God is working in our lives and He may have things going on of which we are not really aware. And we are involved in things that He wants brought to the fore that are going to involve either some kind of a witness or they are going to



be responsible for the development of character within us or those who are around us, maybe even the straightening out of some kind of an injustice of some kind or another. I do not know. There is all kinds of ways that this can go. But we have to, in faith, trust Him. That is the hard part because sometimes it gets scary. You have got to, in faith, trust Him that somehow or another this thing is going to work out right.

**Acts 23:31-32** Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. [Antipatris was partway between Jerusalem and Caesarea.] The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks.

So about 200-plus of them returned back to Jerusalem, at least that many. So now his contingent is cut by at least half.

They made good time. Antipatris is about 35 miles northwest of Jerusalem, and in verse 33, another 25 more miles,

**Acts 23:33-35** When they came to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded them to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

The reason he asked that question about where Paul was from was he had to, first of all, make sure that he had jurisdiction in the case. And he did. So now Felix was going to take over this case.

Now what chapters 24 and 25 are going to paint for us, in addition to further adventures of Paul, it is going to give us a pretty clear account of the cruelty and corruptibility of Roman justice. Maybe Roman justice was better than some in the ancient world, but Roman justice, especially in the occupied territories, which was what the Samaria and Judea were, was not all that good. And so we are going to see more specifically what the charges are and what Paul's defense is.

But the first thing we are going to do is take a look at a couple of the actors in this drama here. First of all, there is Felix. Felix was a brother of a man that I am sure none of you are going to recognize, but his name was Pallas. Now Pallas is important to Felix because Pallas was a freed slave who was a Roman citizen. And more importantly, he was a slave on whom Emperor Claudius doted. Claudius liked the man, he was right in the court.

Now Felix, his brother, also would have been born a slave. But apparently through his connections, he was able to become a freed man, a citizen of Rome. Now his connection was with Antonia, who was the mother of Emperor Claudius. Now Claudius liked Pallas but Antonia, his mother, liked Felix. So this man has connections right in the throne. Now both Pallas and Felix were practically raised in the court and so both of them were reasonably good friends of Claudius, though Pallas was closer than was Felix.

Through Pallas, Felix became appointed to a subordinate government position in Syria, which is north of Palestine, and then from there to Samaria. In Samaria (he got there in 48 AD), he served under a man, a governor, whose name was Clumanus. Now in 52 AD Clumanus was deposed as governor of Samaria and guess who took over. Felix did. Now he not only became governor of Samaria, but again, there must have been a lot of string-pulling going on, he was also made governor of Judea as well. So he now had a post that was more important than his former boss.

What was unusual about this is that freed slaves in Rome could normally enjoy a high status only as a part of the retinue of a person who was freeborn and of higher status. In other words, he could be part of the retinue of say, Claudius the emperor, and Claudius could set him free and Claudius could give him citizenship, but normally all he was then was a retainer. He might be a very influential retainer, but he did not really hold any high position. But somehow or another, Felix got a position that normally went to a high ranking freeborn Roman citizen. He was now governor of two territories, Samaria and Judea.

Now, during his governorship, insurrections and anarchy increased. Now try as he would—he used very brutal methods of suppressing the problem—he only succeeded in alienating the Jews ever more and more. Now the Roman

historian Tacitus describes him as being a master of cruelty and lust to exercise the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave. Proverbs or Ecclesiastes has something to say about that, about a slave getting in a king's position. And it almost seems like Felix was the model for this.

Despite his low birth, Felix somehow managed to marry three women who were free-born princesses. Now he did not do this all at once. He married one and divorced her, married the second one, divorced her, married the third one, and divorced her.

The first one that he married was the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra—everybody knows Antony and Cleopatra—which made Felix grandson-in-law to Antony. Now, Claudius the emperor by comparison was a natural born grandson of Antony. Now his third wife, that is the one we are going to be interested in here, was a lady by the name of Drusilla. She was the daughter of Agrippa the First. Now this Drusilla had been married as a teenager to a king by the name of Azizus, of a small principality called Emesa. (We will get to that in just a little bit later because it comes back into the story.) Now, Felix wanted her, he desired her because she was a real looker, see, she really looked good. And she wanted him for another reason. We will get to that in just a little bit, at least I think we will if we have enough time. But I am just doing this to let you know things never change, you see.

At any rate, she was persuaded to leave her husband through the intervention of a magician by the name of Adamas. This guy was a Cypriot. And there is some thought that this Adamas was the Elymas that we have read of earlier in the book of Acts. Remember him? Elymas the magician that Paul confronted and the guy went blind. It is thought that he might have been exactly the same one. Anyway, through this intrigue, this Adamas convinced Drusilla to leave her husband Azizus, and she did. She divorced him, ran off to Samaria, and I cannot say that she lived happily ever after because she is going to come back in the story in just a little bit.

Anyway, in 59 AD, Felix was recalled to go to Rome because of the outbreak of more trouble there. And he went back to Rome and history loses sight of him and Drusilla too.

There is one more person we have to involve here, and that is Tertullus. He is also mentioned in the first verse. Tertullus was a lawyer. Apparently he was hired by the Sanhedrin to represent the Jews. He was probably a Hellenist Jew who was familiar with both Jewish custom and Roman law, so they hired him to plead their case before Felix. And we find also that there were with them Ananias, the high priest, and some of the elders, and that probably included both Sadducees and Pharisees.

**Acts 24:2-4** 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, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from [your sponsor]."

Now that is not in there. Great goop. . . I guess it was the common way of approaching someone of that position at the time. But at any rate this flattery must have been somewhat customary because even Paul gives a little bit of it, and we will get to that in just a little bit.

It is very likely that what we have here is only a resume of the entirety of what Tertullus said. But it is very likely that Luke cut it down in order to give us the essence of the charge that was made against Paul. Now it is very likely that any of the, let us say, the common Jews, if they had heard what Tertullus said they would have been shocked by the lawyer's claims of great peace and reforms and foresight and profound gratitude for Felix's frequent displays of cruelty. Wow. Anyway, there were steadily deteriorating conditions, and Felix played a large part in getting the Jews angered to the place where they outright rebelled in 66 AD.

The charges are these:

**Acts 23:5** "For we have found this man a plague, . . .

The word means an infectious fellow, a public nuisance. Somebody, if he gets in a group of people, they are going to become just like he is. You get infected with the same ideas, an instigator of problems.

**Acts 24:5-6** . . . a creator of dissension [to this point this is the most serious charge as far as the Romans are concerned, because sedition was punishable by death] among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple [the desecration of the temple], and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law."

Now they had two things going for them that might have caused a death penalty for Paul. The one was the charge of sedition against Rome, the stirring up of insurrection, and the second was the desecration of the Temple. That if Felix would give them permission to try him by the Sanhedrin, then the outcome would have been the same as the trial of Jesus. What were the Jews charging Jesus with? "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." And if the Jews would have had half a chance, they would have put Jesus to death. Instead it was done for them by the Romans. So there was a pincer movement by the Jews here, hoping to get him either on the theological side or on the political side, one way or the other.

**Acts 24:7-9** "But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him." And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

What they said there in verses 7 through 9, was that, "Well, we were going to take care of this thing all by ourselves, but Lysias came by and intervened." And this statement here "by examining him" probably means by examining Lysias you may ascertain that these things of which we accuse Paul are true.

**Acts 24:10** Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him, . . .

You notice he nodded. He did not speak. He did not say "Paul, it's your turn now." I guess governors do not have to speak. They just go like that. (\*nods) So the governor nodded, and so Paul begins.

**Acts 24:10** "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, . . .

Now Paul begins with some something that is somewhat complimentary, certainly a lot briefer and also a lot truer as well. He did not puff him all up. But what he did say was true. You have been a judge, which indicates that Paul was telling him, I expect you to be able to make a right decision in this case because you have been around, you have learned a thing or two, and therefore I have confidence in your decision.

**Acts 24:11-12** . . . because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city."

The basis of the beginning of his defense is this: "Now look, Felix, I was only in the city for 12 days. How could I possibly get an insurrection started in 12 days? That's hardly enough time to foment a rebellion." And he is also implying here by the 12 days that this thing happened so recently that it is going to be very easy, if you want to go get some witnesses, they will be able to show you that what I am saying to you is true. In other words, this is not a case that has been sat upon for two years before you are hearing it. These witnesses are still alive. This thing is still fresh in their memories, and they are going to be able to tell you the truth.

The next thing. He says, "I went up to Jerusalem to worship." His purpose for coming there was not to foment a rebellion. It was not to evangelize. It was to worship. Now we know very well that what Paul is saying is true. He would not have evangelized in Jerusalem. There is a decision that is written in Galatians 2:7-9 where it was determined by the apostles that Peter would go to the Jews and Paul would go to the Gentiles. Jerusalem was a Jewish city. He would do no evangelizing there. Not only that, he had confirmed that in one of his letters where he said that he did not build upon other men's work. He broke new territory. He went where other people had not been. So, we know there that he is telling the truth.

Now worship here, we know from the context earlier what that amounted to. It amounted to the paying of those vows at the Temple and to offer praise to God for the advancements in the gospel.

**Acts 24:13** "Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.

Here he is answering the specific charge about desecrating the Temple. They have no witnesses. They did not bring any witnesses with them. Can you imagine that? All they brought were charges.

**Acts 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."

What Paul is doing here is he is insisting that the real reason that he is now before Felix is religious. That is, that he worships somewhat differently than the Jews. Now, can you understand why he is doing this? Paul is on the attack. He is doing this because the Romans had no jurisdiction. They were not competent to judge a trial that involved religious differences between two religious bodies.

Now there is an interesting thing here. You will notice back in verse 5, when the Jews were making their charge they accused Paul of being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. In verse 14, Paul says, "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, . . ." Now what is interesting about this is that it gives some sort of an idea of why the Jews took the approach that they did. And that is, they viewed Christianity as being a sect of Judaism, whereas the Christians viewed Christianity as being something separate and distinct from Judaism. That is, they had things in common. They both use the same Book. But the one was separate from the other.

That is interesting because in some ways they were so close. The Christians worshipped at the Temple or in the synagogues of the Jews wherever they happened to be as long as they were welcome there. And whenever the Jews

got uppity about them being there, then they went and met together in somebody's house. But as long as they were permitted, they had, I guess you would call it, this intercourse together. But Paul is making it, I think, pretty clear here that though the Jews may look upon Christianity as being a sect of Judaism and therefore something over which they had authority, Paul was saying, "Oh no. This is a way of life, a way of worshipping God that is distinct, even though we have some things in common."

**Acts 24:15-16** "I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there is a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. [One of the common doctrines.] This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men."

What Paul is saying here is that if a person really believes in the resurrection, he is surely going to conduct his life in such a way that his conscience will be clear both toward God and toward men. This is part of Paul's defense, that is, that if a person really believes in the resurrection, he will not be guilty of starting some kind of a riot in a holy place. Because he could not keep his conscience clear toward God or men in that kind of a situation if he was the stirrer of insurrection, because that violates the way of God. We are supposed to respect government and not be insurrectionists. And we are supposed to respect and be tolerant toward the beliefs of others because God has not called them, and they are ignorant of His way. So he would not desecrate a temple. That is what he is alluding to here. He says, "My conscience is clear. I haven't done anything like that."

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

The alms was that contribution from the saints that we have been reading about in I Corinthians 16 and Romans 15, how that they collected the money from the Philippian church and the Thessalonians and the Corinthians and the Ephesians, and they took it down there to Jerusalem to help the poor saints. That is what he is referring to. And the offerings were the completion of those vows, the payments that Paul made for those four men who were completing a vow.



**Acts 24:18** . . . in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a multitude nor with a tumult."

So actually it was during the ceremony that he was discovered. Now, the implication of this is that it should have been obvious to those people that a man involved in a religious service was not going to be stirring up a riot.

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

They meaning the Jews of Asia, the ones that stirred it up. Now, this is a very serious countercharge by Paul. A Roman justice apparently had a very hard record against those who started a suit through the courts and then withdrew and left the thing hanging just by abandoning the case. Well, what Paul is saying here is, look, the reason they are not here is because they do not have any witnesses.

**Acts 24:20-21** "Or else let those who are here themselves say if they have found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, 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.'"

Now you see how he began to put in elements of the gospel, the resurrection of the dead, the hope of all of us.

It is very likely that what we have here again is just a resume of what of what Paul said. So again in verses 20 and 21, especially in verse 21, he is again attempting to make it very clear that he is here because of theological differences, not criminal charges. Therefore, a Roman court has no jurisdiction. They are not competent for judging this matter.

**Acts 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."

To this point, Felix seems to have judged the case pretty accurately. Accurately but not fairly. Now he was fairly well acquainted with the church so he could see that the charges were religious in nature. Now, his decision was to remove the possibility of a confrontation between Paul and the priests. He did that by holding on to Paul, by refusing to let him go. So he put Paul in protective custody. That is what we would call it today. And that protective custody was in Herod's palace there in Caesarea.

Now to Ananias was given the deceptive promise of a decision whenever Lysias arrived. That was stupid because Lysias had sent him a letter. What was Lysias going to add? There is no indication as far as I know that Lysias ever showed up. He did not need Lysias' testimony at all because he had Lysias' statement there in chapter 23, verse 26 on. So Paul was given a measure of liberty.

**Acts 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.

Now I am sure that by this time, Ananias being no dummy, and certainly we know that Paul was no dummy, and both of them understood that there was not going to be any decision made until there was a change of governors. Apparently the Romans must have changed governors about every two years. Whether that was their practice or whether the situation demanded it here in Judea, Samaria, I do not know. But they did have different governors, 58 to 60, 60 to 62, 62 to 64, and 64 to 66. So it appears as though they changed them about every two years.

The question here is, why did Felix hold Paul at all? There was no case. Now one reason is going to be stated definitely in just a few verses. The second reason is that because there had been a tumult there in Jerusalem, and because Felix could see the anger, the concern on the part of the Jews, it is very likely that he might have felt that there is more here than meets the eye. Sort of like where there is smoke, there is fire.

Now, I do not think that it was a fair judgment at all. But remember, God has a plan that He is working out here, and it is very likely that those thoughts would have come to Felix's mind.

In verse 24, we have a little vignette here. We get back to Felix and his wife Drusilla.

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

So now we have here a Roman governor and his Jewish wife and a Christian apostle. Drusilla, remember, had been married to Azizus who was king of Amasa. Now Amasa was a small territory there in Syria. Now she married this Azizus whenever she was a teen and she must have really been a looker because this Azizus was willing to convert from his paganism to Judaism in order to marry this teenager. However, she was unhappy with him. We do not know whether he had warts or what it was, but she was unhappy with him. But she was captivated by Felix. Apparently, she liked his ruthlessness, and the way he executed his power, and he was captivated by her beauty. So she accepted his offer of marriage. Remember this gal was a princess, the daughter of a king, and this guy had been born a slave. But neither his low birth, nor his Roman paganism, nor her Jewish scruples could keep her from marrying him.

Now their whole relationship seems to be based on lust and greed. Not only that, expectations, especially on her part, of grandeur. He lusted after her body, she lusted after his ruthlessness and power and expectations that she was getting right in with somebody who was close to the emperor.

Apparently though, after hearing Paul speak at the trial (now maybe she might have been there too, but maybe Felix told her some of the things that Paul said), they had qualms of conscience. And so they heard him concerning faith in Christ.

**Acts 24:25** Now as he reasoned about righteousness, . . .

Look at this! Righteousness, meaning morality. Here he is on his third wife. Here she is on her second husband. I do not think it took a mind reader for Paul to realize that here we have got a relationship based on lust and greed. Now, Paul apparently did not hold back one bit.

**Acts 24:25** . . . righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, .  
..

Oh boy, that is the big one right there. You may skin by right here now, Felix and Drusilla, but there is God that you are going to have to answer to.

**Acts 24:25** . . . Felix was afraid. . .

The Greek is stronger than that. It is terrified. Can you imagine? Here is this ruthless, cruel governor, and here is the apostle Paul, one single human individual, and now Felix is shaking in his boots. Well, Felix was not about to repent.

**Acts 24:25** . . . and [he] answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

Can you imagine that? He ordered Paul to stop. It is very likely that Felix went there with the idea, "Well, we will have a nice discussion on religion. We'll talk about the gods. Which one's the best one?" But the talk, I am sure, quickly shifted from divergent religious views to personal morality and responsibility and duty.

Verse 26 comes the other reason.

**Acts 24:26** Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him.

He wanted to bribe Paul. Paul mentioned that he brought a gift to the poor in Jerusalem. Maybe this Paul has money and that if Felix could get a little bit of that he could pull some strings and would just cause this thing to disappear. Paul would not bend.

**Acts 24:26** Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.