

ACTS

Chapter 24

The Trial Before Felix

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. 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 ^a 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. 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. 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.’” 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. 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. 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.**

24:1 *Five days later.* After the departure from Jerusalem. This would allow just enough time for a messenger to go from Caesarea to Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin to appoint their representatives, and the appointees to make the return journey to Caesarea.

Ananias. See note on 23:2. The high priest himself made the 60-mile journey to supervise the case personally.

elders. The Sanhedrin was made up of 71 elders. The designation was used of both the religious and the political councils. See notes on Ex 3:16; 2Sa 3:17; Joel 1:12; Mt 15:2.

lawyer. Lit. “orator.” In a court trial one trained in forensic rhetoric would serve as an attorney at law.

Tertullus. A common variant of the name Tertius. Possibly he was a Roman but more likely a Hellenistic Jew familiar with the procedures of the Roman court.

24:2–3 *long period of peace ... with profound gratitude.* The expected eulogy with which to introduce a speech before a judge. In his six years in office Felix had eliminated bands of robbers, thwarted organized assassins and crushed a movement led by an Egyptian (see note on 21:38). But in general his record was not good. He was recalled by Rome two years later because of misrule. His reforms and improvements are hard to identify historically. – With his powerful connections in Rome, however, Felix felt he could conduct a government of extortion, cruelty, and oppression in Palestine and get away with it, as even the Roman historian Tacitus admits in pointing to Felix as a prime cause of the great Jewish rebellion against Rome in A.D. 66. (LL)

24:5 *troublemaker ... ringleader of the Nazarene sect.* To excite dissension in the empire was treason against Caesar. To be a leader of a religious sect without Roman approval was contrary to law.

the Nazarene sect. Christianity.

24:6 *tried to desecrate the temple.* The charge is now qualified by “an attempt,” rather than the former claim (see note on 21:28).

24:7 See NIV text note on vv. 6–8.

24:10 Paul’s reserved introduction lacks the flattery employed by Tertullus (vv. 2–4).

24:11 *twelve days ago.* Paul answers each accusation. He was not a troublemaker, and he had not been involved in disturbances. He had but recently arrived in Jerusalem. He had spent five days in Caesarea and nearly seven in Jerusalem.

24:14 *worship ... God ... as a follower of the Way.* Paul admits to his part in the Way, but he still believes the Law and the Prophets. He shares the same hope as the Jews—resurrection and judgment (v. 15).

24:15 THERE WILL BE A RESURRECTION – In defense before Felix, before Festus (25:1-12) and before Agrippa (25:13-26:32) Paul tried each time to lead to the message that God raised Jesus from the dead. Also, Paul’s reminder that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked was really a call for all who heard him to repent. (PBC)

24:16 *conscience clear.* See note on 23:1. – He knew that deliberate sin can destroy faith. (PBC)

24:17 *to bring my people gifts for the poor.* The only explicit reference in Acts to the collection that was so important to Paul (see note on 20:4).
to present offerings. May refer to Paul’s help in sponsoring those who were fulfilling their vows (see 21:24). He also may have intended to present offerings for himself.

24:19 *Jews from the province of Asia.* See 21:27–29. The absence of these Asian Jews would seem to suggest that they could not substantiate their accusations.

24:21 *concerning the resurrection.* Paul again introduces the point of contention between the Pharisees and Sadducees.

24:22 *well acquainted with the Way.* Felix could not have governed Judea and Samaria for six years without becoming familiar with the place and activities of the Christians.

24:23 *to give him some freedom.* Perhaps Paul was under house arrest similar to what he experienced while waiting trial in Rome (28:30–31)—in recognition of the fact that he was a Roman citizen who had not been found guilty of any crime.

24:24 *Drusilla.* Felix’s third wife, daughter of Herod Agrippa I. At age 15 she married Azizus, king of Emesa, but deserted him for Felix a year later. Her son, also named Agrippa, died in the eruption of Vesuvius (A.D. 79).

24:25 *Felix was afraid.* Hearing of righteousness, self-control and the judgment, Felix looked at his past life and was filled with fear. He had a spark of sincerity and concern.
When I find it convenient. Lust, pride, greed and selfish ambition made it continually inconvenient to change.

24:26 *offer him a bribe.* Felix supposed that Paul had access to considerable funds. He had heard of his bringing an offering to the Jewish Christians in Palestine (see v. 17). So he wanted Paul to give him money in order to secure his release. Paul no longer had the money, nor would he offer a bribe if he had it.

24:27 *Felix was succeeded by ... Festus.* Felix was recalled to Rome in A.D. 59/60 to answer for disturbances and irregularities in his rule, such as his handling of riots between Jewish and Syrian inhabitants. Festus is not mentioned in existing historical

records before his arrival in Palestine. He died in office after two years, but his record for that time shows wisdom and honesty superior to both his predecessor, Felix, and his successor, Albinus.

to grant a favor to the Jews. Felix did not want to incite more anger among the Jews, whom he would be facing in Roman court shortly. To release Paul from prison would do just that. – The next two years were not time lost. Paul was busy with his letters to the churches. Friends like Philip the Evangelist, who was also in Caesarea, would surely have visited him. (LL)