

Friends, don't get me wrong. By no means do I count myself as an expert in all of this, but I've got my eyes on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:13-14 The Message Bible

First Love Ministries, Inc.

First Love Ministries, Inc.

Prayer Study #252

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
CHAPTERS 24, 25, and 26
"Before Kings or Rulers"

Acts 9:15

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My Name's sake."

Acts 24

Paul Is Tried Before Felix

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.
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,
3. "we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.
4. "Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us.
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.
6. "He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law.
7. "But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands,
8. "commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him."
9. And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

10. Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered:
“Inasmuch as I now that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer by myself,
11. “because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.
12. “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city.
13. “Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.
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.
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.
16. “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.
17. “Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation,
18. “in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult.
19. “They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me.
20. “Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council,
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.”
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.”
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.
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.
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.”

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

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

Although Felix was a wicked man in many ways, he seems in this passage to be a fair, impartial judge. As we said last week, he had once been a slave and was the first Roman slave to get promoted all the way up to a governor. He does not hear the case until five days after Paul arrives or until the High Priest Ananias, the Elders and an orator named Tertullus arrive in Caesarea. Tertullus is like a lawyer for the prosecution. He starts off with flattery trying to win Felix over. Felix and Tertullus know that nothing he says is true. Tertullus's comments about Paul are also untrue. He claims that Paul is a pest; an agitator trying to stir up the people; a ring leader of the heretical sect, the Sect of the Nazarenes; and a desecrator and defiler of the Temple at Jerusalem.

The prosecution side was violating the very Law they professed to uphold. They were required to have genuine witnesses, and they had none. Paul admits that he does worship according to The Way, a Jewish group that believed that the Law of Moses and the Prophets point to Jesus Christ as the true Messiah. He also believes in the resurrection of the dead. He tells Felix that he was in Jerusalem only 12 days. He went there to take money to help the Jewish people in Jerusalem. He was in the Temple fulfilling a vow of purification. It was only when the Asian Jews saw him that there was an uproar in the Temple, and they, if they had charges against him, should be at this trial. As it was, the High Priest and Elders had no true charges against Paul, except that he had caused dissension in the Sanhedrin when he brought up the hope of the resurrection.

Felix decides to wait to make a ruling in this case until Chief Captain Lysias could come to give further evidence. Paul was to be kept in custody but was allowed to have visitors.

After some days had passed, Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla sent for Paul who told them about his faith in Christ. Felix was so moved that he is convicted of sin and trembles with guilt. Yet he procrastinates and does not accept Christ, looking for a more convenient time later on. The Word says that *now* is the day of salvation (2nd Corinthians 6:2).

Felix also had another problem: the love of money. Felix thought that Paul and his group would give him money to release Paul. Thus Felix joins an infamous group: Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and Simon the Sorcerer who sinned for money. Many are in ministry today because of the love of

money (1 Timothy 6:10) and are not true ministers but are hirelings (John 10:12-13).

After two years, Felix is dismissed as the governor, but wanting to maintain favor with the Jews, he leaves Paul incarcerated. The Jews hated Felix because he had sided with the Greeks in a dispute over the city of Caesarea. The Jews felt that this was a Jewish city. The Greeks believed it was a Greek city. A riot broke out between the two groups. The Jews basically won, until Felix sided with the Gentiles and allowed his troops to kill thousands of Jews and to ransack and loot the homes of wealthy Jews in the city. The Jews appealed to Rome. The Emperor dismissed the governor and appointed Festus in his place. Felix would have been executed except that his brother Pallas was a favorite of Nero and interceded for him.

Festus was a just and upright man. Unfortunately, he died after serving only two years in office.

Selected Verses from Acts 25

Festus goes to Jerusalem where the Jews try to persuade him to send Paul down to them. They secretly plan to ambush Paul's escort and kill Paul on the way from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Festus refuses to send Paul and has his own hearing when he returns to Caesarea. The Jews again accuse Paul without being able to prove anything. Wanting to do the Jews a favor, Festus asked Paul if he will go to Jerusalem to be tried. Paul, knowing that it is God's will for him to go to Rome, refuses:

10. So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know.

11. "For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

12. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

King Agrippa and his wife Bernice come to Caesarea to welcome Festus. After many days, Festus tells Agrippa about Paul's case, and Agrippa's curiosity is raised and he asks to hear Paul. Besides Agrippa, the prominent men of the community and the commanders are invited to the hearing. From the beginning Festus admits that he has examined Paul but found no specific charges to charge him with.

Selected Verses from Acts 26

Paul once more reviews his life history, telling for the third time in detail of his conversion on the Damascus Road and witnessing Christ. Festus says that Paul must be crazy.

24. Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

25. But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason,

26. "For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things: for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.

27. "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

28. Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

29. And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

30. When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them;

31. and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains."

32. Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Even though Paul was a prisoner in chains, he commands the respect and attention of everyone in the room. His words are so powerful that King Agrippa admits that what Paul is sharing almost persuades him to become a Christian. These men, although kings and rulers, not only listen to the words of Paul but also feel the *dunamis* power that he is anointed with from on high. They find absolutely no fault in Paul. Yet legally they have no choice but to send him on to Rome because Paul has appealed to Caesar. Thus, the following last two chapters of Acts will take us on Paul's last journey, his travel to Rome where he will eventually die as a martyr for Christ.

Almost Persuaded
P. Bliss

“Almost persuaded,” now to believe;
“Almost persuaded,” Christ to receive;
Seems now some soul to say,
“Go, Spirit, go Thy way,
Some more convenient day
On Thee I’ll call.”

“Almost persuaded,” come, come today;
“Almost persuaded,” turn not away;
Jesus invites you here,
Angels are ling’ring near,
Prayers rise from hearts so dear,
O wand’rer, come.

“Almost persuaded,” harvest is past!
“Almost persuaded,” doom comes at last!
“Almost “ cannot avail;
“Almost” is but to fail!
Sad, sad, that bitter wail,
“Almost,” but lost.