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Paul’s Witness before Governor Felix 24: 1-27

57-59 AD

Paul’s witness before Governor Felix DIG: Felix had a reputation of violently suppressing rebellions against Rome. How might Tertullus hope this would compensate for the lack of evidence he could offer? How might all the charges in verses 5-6 seem true to Ananias and Tertullus? What does their reference to believers as the Nazarene sect show about their view of the Way? How then does Paul defend himself in verses 11-19? Given what happened in Corinth (18:12-16), why might Paul want to shift the focus of the controversy to his belief in the resurrection? What do you learn about Felix from verses 22-26? Why does he merely put Paul under house arrest? In light of 23:11, what must Paul be feeling as time wears on and no progress at all is made?

REFLECT: How has your desire to serve Messiah been misunderstood by others? Why do you think God is willing to go to such lengths to have His gospel proclaimed to those who have no interest in hearing it? What’s the difference between being well acquainted with the Way in verse 22 and being a true believer? How long before you were saved? Have you ever felt there was a period in your life that was “dead time” – time when nothing seemed to be happening at all (as seems the case with Paul here)? Why do you think God allows such times to happen? Perhaps you, too, know someone who is waiting for a later time before they seriously consider the claims of Christ. What do you think they are waiting for?

This chapter presents one of the most tragic examples of missed opportunity in all of the Bible. **Felix**, **the** Roman **governor of Judea**, had the privilege of spending much time with the apostle **Paul**. Yet, sadly, **he** let the opportunity slip away, and there is no evidence that **he** ever accepted **Yeshua Messiah** as **his** personal **Lord and Savior**.

The Scriptures are full of examples of those who missed salvation opportunities. Some pagan philosophers, after hearing **Paul's** defense of the faith on Mars Hill in Athens (**to see link click Cb – An Unknown God in Athens**), dismissed **him** with the words: **We will hear from you again about this (17:32).** But **Paul** soon left Athens, never to return, and the philosophers never heard **him**, or the gospel, again.

Yeshua was approached by **a Torah-teacher** who said that **he** would follow **Him** wherever **He** went, but when **he** learned that **he** had to **deny himself**; **he** had not counted the costs and faded away. Another potential recruit wanted to **bury his father first**; **he** was too slow, evidently never to return. **Still another** first wanted to **say goodbye to his family**; **he** spiritual priorities were out of order (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gl – The Son of Man Has No Place to Lay His Head**), and was lost. To all the excuses people come up with, the Bible has the answers. But there is no guarantee people will accept them.

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Jw – The Parable of the Ten Virgins**) also illustrates the tragedy of missed opportunity. So does the story of the rebellious Israelites who died in the wilderness and failed to enter the Promised Land (see the commentary on **Hebrews As – Today, If You Hear His Voice, Do Not Harden Your Hearts**). How many other untold stories like this have there ever been?

But the most striking example of lost opportunity is **Judas**. **He** was graciously granted the opportunity given to only eleven others – to live and minister with **the Lord Jesus Christ** during **His** earthly ministry. **He** could have sat on one of **the twelve thrones** in the Messianic Kingdom, judging **the twelve tribes of Isra'el (Matthew 19:28)**. **His** name could have been on the twelve foundations of the New **Jerusalem** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fu – The New Jerusalem had a Great, High Wall with Twelve Gates**). **He** could have been one of the most honored believers of all time. Instead, **Judas** became a thief, hypocrite, and a traitor. **He** threw away **his** opportunity for a paltry **thirty pieces of silver**, committed suicide (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lm – Judas Hangs Himself**), and was condemned to eternal damnation. Our **Lord** summed up **Judas'** life this way: **Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born (Mattityahu 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22).**

Felix was tragically similar to **Judas**. Where **Judas** lived with **Jesus** for more than

three years; **Felix** had **Paul** in **his** palace for **two**. **Judas** had many opportunities to talk with **Yeshua**; **Felix sent for Paul frequently and would talk with him (24:26b).Judas** betrayed **the Son of God** for **money; Felix was hoping that money would be given to him by Paul (24:26a). Judas** betrayed **the Lord** to **the Jewish authorities**; **Felix** fearing those same **authorities**, betrayed **Paul** by refusing to release **him** despite **his** innocence.[565]



The prosecution: Five days after **Paul** arrived at Caesarea **the kohen gadol Ananias came down** from **Jerusalem with some of the elders,** or leaders of **the Sanhedrin** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lg – The Great Sanhedrin**). But **they** did not argue the case against **Paul** for **themselves**, **they** hired **an attorney named Tertullus (24:1a).** Whether he was a Roman or a Hellenistic **Jew** is not known, but **he** was likely chosen because **he** was well versed in Roman law. It was not unusual for **Jews** to hire such experts to represent them in Roman legal proceedings.

The Jews brought formal charges against Paul before the governor. When Paul was called in, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: **We are enjoying much peace through you.** This was careful flattery because there were two uprisings between **Jews** and Gentiles during **his** reign; in fact, **he** was eventually recalled because of them (see **Cu – Paul Escorted to Caesarea** for more details on **governor Felix**). **And we are enjoying the reforms you introduced for this nation because of your foresight.** This was no more than flattery because **he** actually encouraged bands of thieves and shared the spoil with them. **We acknowledge this, most excellent Felix, in every way and every place with all gratitude. But** then **Tertullus** made the transition to the actual case in hand. **In order that I may not weary you any longer, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly (24:1b-4). His** introductory comments were brief because there was little good **he** could say about **Felix** and little bad **he** could say about **Paul**.[566]

Paul stood in the great hall to face **his** accusers and **his** judge, on trial for **his** life. Always **the Lord's** promise echoed in the back of **his** mind: **So you must also testify in Rome (23:11).** But **the prosecutor's** accusations against **Paul** were no more truthful than **his** flattery. **Tertullus went on to name three accusations against Paul.**

First, Tertullus claimed to **have found this man to be a troublemaker (24:5a).** At first glance this seems to be a ridiculous charge, a bit of name-calling with nothing specific to back it up. But actually it was a carefully calculated move. **Tertullus** wanted to broaden the scope of **his** accusation into provoking insurrection throughout the Roman world. This was the charge of sedition. No Roman official wanted to be guilty of permitting anything that would threaten the *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace). **Felix** in particular would have been sensitive to such a charge. **His** entire administration had been marked by having to put down one **Jewish** insurrection after another. **He** had done so decisively and cruelly. **He** maintained the peace at any cost.

The **second** charge was really a variation of the first. **Tertullus** accused **Paul** of being **a ringleader of the Nazarene sect** (**the** unbelieving **Jews** called **the Jewish** believers **Nazarenes**)**, stirring up riots among all the Jewish people throughout the** Roman **world (24:5b)**. It was certainly true that **Paul** was a leader in the Church. By linking the comment with the charge of provoking insurrection **throughout the** Roman **world, Tertullus** implied that **the Nazarenes** as a whole were a dangerous and seditious **sect** and that **Paul** was one of the main collaborators. The ramifications of **the Jewish** charges now became very clear. Should the charge be made to stick for **Paul**, the entire Church would be viewed as a dangerous, revolutionary movement. Fortunately, **Tertullus** could not substantiate the charge, and **Felix** was already too informed about **the Nazarenes** to take **him** seriously.

The **third** charge against **Paul** was that **he even tried to defile the Temple** (**the** Asian **Jews** thought **Paul** had actually done so, but by this time even **his accusers** realized that **he** had not)**, but we seized him** (this is a gross understatement – **they** actually wanted to stone **him** to death)**. We wanted to judge him according to our own Torah. But the commander Lysias come along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ordering his accusers to come before you.** Had **Tertullus** substantiated this charge, it would have obligated **Felix** to turn **Paul** over to the jurisdiction of **the Sanhedrin** and almost certain death. The charge, however, was totally false and based on an erroneous

conclusion by **the** Asian **Jews (21:29)**. This was probably why **they** were not present before **Felix** to substantiate the charge. **Tertullus** concluded **his** accusations by telling **Felix, "By examining Lysias yourself, you will be able to learn from him all these things about which we accuse him."** That would explain **Felix's** decision to postpone a verdict until **he** heard from **Lysias (24:22)**. Naturally, **the Judean leaders also joined in the attack, affirming that these things were true (24:6-9).**[567]

The defense: Perhaps suggestive of **his** sense of power, without a word, by a mere **nod of the head, Felix** gestured for **Paul** to begin **his** defense. **He** also began with some flattery towards **Felix**, although it was considerably more subdued than **Tertullus'** opening remarks. **Knowing that you have been a judge over this nation for many years, I gladly make my own defense (24:10). Paul responded to each of Tertullus' three accusations.**



First, he was not a **troublemaker**, but went about **his** business quietly**. As you can verify, it was no more than twelve days** (which is not enough time to start a revolt) **since I went up to Jerusalem to worship** at the festival of Shavu'ot**. Paul** turned **Tertullus'** words against **him**. **The prosecutor** had said that by examining **Paul, Felix** would be able to verify the charges against **him (23:8)**. **Paul**, however, responded that the opposite was the case: **Felix** would be able to verify that **Paul** was worshipping, not **inciting a riot**. Contrary to **their** charges, **Paul** stated that **they did not find me arguing with anyone or inciting a riot – not in the Temple or in the synagogues or anywhere else in the City.** In short, **Paul** replied that **the Jews** couldn't **prove to you the charges they now bring against me (24:11-13).**

In response to the **second** charge, **Paul** defended **himself** of being a ringleader of **the Nazarenes. But** in doing so, he used the opportunity to deliver a sort of mini-sermon, changing his defensive posture into more of a positive witness. **He** said: **this I confess to you, that according to the Way (which they call a sect), I worship the God of our fathers.** This is precisely the response a present-day Messianic **Jews** make to unbelieving Jews who consider them apostate. **The God** Messianic Jews worship is the only **God**, **Elohei-avoteinu,** or **the God of our fathers** (the phrase is found in the first blessing of the 'Amidah, the central synagogue prayer). Likewise today's Messianic **Jew**, with **Paul**, **believes everything written in the Torah and the Prophets,** including the prophecies pointing to **Yeshua** as **the Messiah. In God I have a hope – which these** Pharisees who are accusing **me also wait for – that there will surely be a resurrection of both the righteous** (see the commentary on **Revelation Ff – Blessed and Holy are Those Who Have Part in the First Resurrection**) **and the unrighteous** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fn – The Second Resurrection**) **(24:14-15).**[568] In short, **his** being a **Natzrati**, or a follower of **Yeshua** from **Natzeret**, was no grounds for complaint.

The reference to **the resurrection** was the highpoint in **Paul's** witness in all the speeches of **Acts 23-26.** This was not by accident. **Paul's** conviction in the resurrection constituted the real point of contention with the unbelieving **Jews**. **He** believed in the same TaNaKh, worshiped the same **YHVH**, and shared the same hope. But it was precisely at this point
that **the Way** parted ways with the rest of **the Jews**. **They** believed that **the resurrection** had already begun in **Messiah**, **the first-fruits** of the faith **(First Corinthians 15:23).**

One should observe how the theme of the resurrection unfolds in **Paul's** successive speeches. Before **the Sanhedrin** the theme was set, but there **Paul** merely spoke of the idea of **a resurrection**, the belief in, and hope for, the coming **resurrection (23:6)**. Here, **he** is more explicit. **The resurrection** is more precisely defined as including **both the righteous and the unrighteous,** thereby implying a coming judgment. That **Paul** understood this is clear because **he** spoke of **his** own **blameless conscience** next – **blameless**, that is, with regard to the judgment that all would eventually face. What **Paul** was making clear at **his Caesarean** trial was that the real issue between **him** and **his Jewish accusers** was **the resurrection (24:21)**. Nothing more – nothing less. For us today, this remains the primary dividing line between Messianic Gentiles and **Jews**, and unbelieving **Jews**.

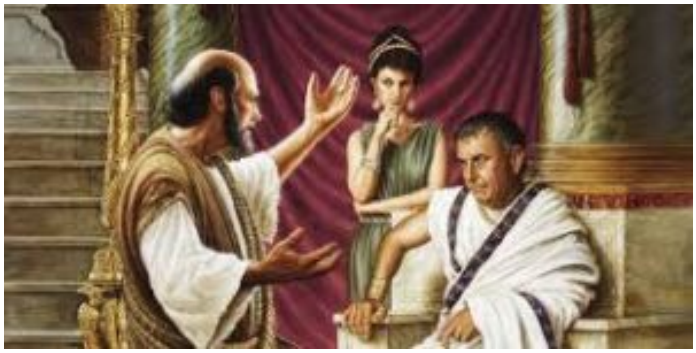
In response to the **third** accusation, **Paul** stated that **he** did nothing wrong, either in **the Temple** or elsewhere. **Therefore, I do my best always to have a clear conscience before both God and men,** precisely because **he** had **a clear** awareness of the coming judgment **(First Corinthians 3:10-15, 9:25-27). Now after my** third missionary journey**, I came to bring tzedakah to the poor** in the Messianic Community in **Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-28; First Corinthians 16:1-4; Second Corinthians 8:13-14, 9:12-13** and **Galatians 2:10) and to present offerings** for the festival of Shavu'ot**. As I was doing this, they found me in the Temple, having been purified** (Greek: *hagnizo*, meaning *a ritual bath outside the Temple Compound*) **– without any crowd or uproar (24:16-18).**

Then, **Paul** briefly summarized the events covered in **21:17-30: There were some Jewish people from Asia, who** were the real instigators of the riot, **they ought to be here before you to press charges if they have anything against me (24:19).** That was standard Roman legal procedure. Instead, with **their** total lack of supporting evidence, **they** were nowhere to be found! **Paul** had scored an important legal point and **Felix** was sure to have noticed. For **Tertullus** to have made an accusation against **Paul** with the total absence of witnesses was a serious breach of court procedure. There was simply no evidence to counter what **Paul** had said. Far from **defiling the Temple, he** had come there to bring offerings![569]

Having successfully demonstrated that **Tertullus'** accusations were totally without supporting evidence, **Paul** proceeded to the one genuine charge that could be brought against **him**. There were even "eye-witnesses for the prosecution" present to support this charge, namely the **high priest** and **the Sadducees** who had come with **Tertullus. Paul** declared: **Let these men themselves tell what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the Sanhedrin** (see **Cr – Paul's Defense Before the Great Sanhedrin**) **– except for this one** thing that **I shouted out while standing among them, "It is about the resurrection of the dead** (specifically **the resurrection** of **Yeshua Messiah**) **that today I am on trial before you" (24:20-21).** In other words, that which was criminal was not true of **Paul**, and that which was true of **Paul** (that of being **a Nazarene**) was not criminal.[570]

The verdict: Felix obviously viewed the conflict as a "no-win" situation. The anger of **the Jews** and the Roman citizenship of **Paul** left **Felix** on the horns of a dilemma. **He** lacked the wisdom to make the appropriate decision, so **he** did

nothing.[571] **But Felix, having a rather extensive knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will rule on your case."** There is no evidence that **Lysias** ever came or that **Felix** ever sent for **him**. **He** was merely putting off the whole matter. **He** didn't want to pass a verdict, for the verdict would have surely been one of acquittal. Like **Lysias** before **him** and **Festus** after **him, he** must have realized that **Paul** was guilty of no crime by Roman law. Still, **he** ruled over **the Jews** and had to live with **them**. Therefore, **he gave the centurion orders for Paul to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from attending to his needs.** The awareness of **Paul's** Roman citizenship probably contributed to the special courtesy **he** granted to this most unusual prisoner.[572]



Now some days later, Felix was hoping that money would be given to him by Paul; so he sent for him frequently and would talk with him. But after two years had passed, wishing to do the Judean leaders a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. At the same time too, after **Paul's Jewish accusers** had gone back to **Jerusalem**, **Felix came with his wife Drusilla. She** was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I (see **Bk – Peter's Persecution and Deliverance**). Since **she was Jewish**, **she** may have been the one gave **him a rather extensive knowledge of the Way. He** already knew some things about **Yeshua**; nevertheless, **he sent for Paul and listened to him speak about faith in Messiah** because **he** wanted to know more**. But as Paul reasoned** with **the governor about righteousness** (which **he** had none)**, self-control** (again, **he** had none)**, and the coming judgment, Felix became afraid and** said: **Go away for now!** A total skeptic would have dismissed **Paul's** reference to judgment as sheer fantasy, but not **Felix**. **His fear** was genuine. **He** was at the point of conviction. But **he** was never willing to step over the line from knowledge to faith (see the commentary on **Hebrews Al – How Shall We Escape If We Ignore So Great a Salvation**). In the end **his** greed, lust, and desire to preserve **his** power

overcame **him**, and **he** replied as he left **Paul's** presence: **When I find time, I will summon you (24:24-27).**

On Sunday night, October 8, 1871, the well-known evangelist, D. L. Moody, preached to the largest congregation that he had yet addressed in Chicago. His text that evening was, "What shall I do then with **Jesus** which is called **Christ**" **(Matthew 27:22)**? And at the conclusion of his sermon he said, "I wish you would take this text home with you and turn it over in your mind during the week, and next Sunday we will come to Calvary and the Cross, and we will decide what to do with **Jesus of Nazareth**." Then his song evangelist, Ira Sankey whose hymns are sprinkled throughout most evangelical hymnbooks, began to lead in singing the hymn,

Today the Savior calls;
For refuge fly;
The storm of justice falls,
And death is nigh.

But Sankey never finished the hymn, for while he was singing the rush and roar of fire engines whistled by the church on the street outside, and before morning much of the city of Chicago lay in ashes. To his dying day, Mr. Moody deeply regretted that he had told that congregation to come next Sunday and decide what to do with **Jesus**. "I have never since dared," he said, "to give an audience a week to think of their salvation. If they were lost they might rise up in judgment against me. I have never seen that congregation since. I will never meet those people until I meet them in another world. But I want to tell you of one lesson that I learned that night which I have never forgotten, and that is, when I preach, to press **Christ** upon the people then and there and try to bring them to a decision on the spot. I would rather have that right hand cut off than to give an audience a week now to decide what to do with **Jesus**." Like Moody before the great Chicago fire, we should not allow ourselves to say, "Tomorrow!" Because tragically for most, that day of grace never comes![573]

Lord, *I am so grateful that* ***You are not slow in keeping Your promise, as some consider slowness. Rather, You are patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9), to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (First Timothy 2:4).*** *May many understand today – especially those I know and care about – that* ***now is the day of salvation (Second Corinthians 6:2c).***[574]