

# **CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## **DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 25**

### **THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

#### **CHAPTER 24 & 25 A**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Paul was brought to Caesarea from Jerusalem under very heavy guard by the order of Claudius Lysias, the Roman military commander in Jerusalem. Cilicia, the province where Paul was born, was within the jurisdiction of Felix, the Roman Governor who sat in Caesarea. In his letter, Claudius Lysias had informed Felix that he found Paul not guilty of any crime that deserved the death penalty or imprisonment for the charges against Paul were related to the Jewish Law (23:29). Felix now had the responsibility to give Paul a fair hearing either to charge or to release him. So far, Paul had maintained that he was a loyal citizen of Rome and a devout son of Israel. Paul looked to Roman law and justice to prove his innocence and to set himself free. But Roman justice practised by the governor within a local province might not be what was expected. In this study, we will see how Felix and his successor Festus, both governors of Judaea, tried to judge Paul and to juggle between justice and popularity.

A valuable lesson, which we can all learn, is that when we fail to seize an

opportunity that crosses our path, it may never come back again. Depending on the nature of the opportunity, the loss can be immeasurably great. Felix had such an opportunity, but his procrastination dealt him a terrible loss.

Once again, God's sovereignty and providence can be seen in His dealing with the affairs of men. At this stage of human history, there was Paul, the Romans, and the Jewish leaders. Paul, God's faithful servant who could only look to God for help; the Romans, powerful masters of the then known world; and the Jewish leaders, cunning and manipulative, played their part and yet fulfilled God's plan and purpose. It is mysterious and yet real and true.

This lesson covers chapter 24 and part of chapter 25. The passage can be divided as follows: (1) Paul's trial before Felix (24:1-9); (2) Paul's defending himself (24:10-21); (3) Felix's foolish attitude (24:22-27); (4) Paul's trial before Festus (25:1-12).

#### **COMMENTARY**

##### **Paul's Trial Before Felix**

Five days after Paul had left Jerusalem, Ananias the high priest and some Jewish leaders, together with "a certain orator" or barrister-at-law, named Tertullus, "descended" to Caesarea.<sup>1</sup> Tertullus was a trained lawyer who was well versed in Roman law. The court of Felix sat and Paul was called. When

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<sup>1</sup> In Biblical writing, when people go to Jerusalem they always "go up" but when they go from Jerusalem, they always "go down" or "descend." The reason is that Jerusalem is situated about 600 metres (about 2,000 ft) above sea level, and is higher than the adjacent land and valley; hence the idea of going up to Jerusalem and going down from Jerusalem.

he appeared at the court, Tertullus began his prosecution of Paul. Tertullus opened the case against Paul with the customary complimentary salutation to Felix, the Governor and Judge. He praised Felix by admitting that the land had much peace by his wise foresight (Greek, *kartorthoma*, a term used to denote the care of an emperor, and hence gross flattery). It was true that Felix had quelled several insurrections, but always with bloodthirsty severity. And Tertullus went on to thank him and to say that many people in all places acknowledged this. It is obvious that Tertullus who opened his speech with such flowery and exaggerated flattery, intended to win the case by capturing Felix's good-will and favour.

Turning and pointing to Paul, Tertullus laid four charges against him. The first charge was that "this man" (not using his name Paul) was a "pestilent fellow" or troublemaker. Although he was not specific, these were powerful smear words to discredit Paul. The second charge was that of sedition. This was a more serious charge for it involved a crime against Rome. He charged that Paul stirred up riots and rebellion among the Jews throughout the world. The Romans dealt severely with people who disturbed the *Pax Romana* (Peace of Rome). The third charge was that Paul was a "ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" (24:5). This was a charge of heresy or sectarianism. The name "Nazarenes" was a contemptuous term for the followers of Jesus. Jesus was from Nazareth, and was called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23). This was the first use of the word to denote by way of indignation and displeasure against the followers of Jesus Christ — *And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing*

*come out of Nazareth?* (John 1:46) The fourth charge was that Paul went about desecrating the temple (24:6). Observe that the Jewish leaders had dropped the previous charge that Paul had brought Greeks into the temple. The reason was because they could not prove it for it never happened, and since the Asian Jews had disappeared and were not there, the charge could not be substantiated. And in Roman court if there were no witnesses or evidence, it meant no conviction. So, Tertullus gave the impression that Paul had actually been profaning the temple, and that the Jews had exercised within their legal rights to arrest him, and to judge him according to their law. But Claudius Lysias forcefully snatched Paul away from them. Note that Tertullus deliberately did not mention that the Jews actually took Paul and went about to kill him if it had not been for the intervention of Claudius, who saved Paul. But Tertullus subtly blamed the cause of the riots on Claudius, who told them that if they had anything against Paul, they should present it before Felix. Then all the Jewish leaders gave their nod of agreement to what Tertullus had said. But Tertullus and the Jewish leaders did not know that Felix had the official letter from Claudius. It was more likely that Felix would believe his Roman military commander than the hired lawyer Tertullus.

### **Paul's Defence of Himself**

After the prosecution had rested its case, Felix called Paul to speak. Paul also began with the customary salutary address to Felix. Unlike Tertullus, Paul did not flatter Felix, but he mentioned that since Felix had ruled the nation Judaea for many years, he was more than happy to defend the charges against him before him.

For the first charge that he was a “pest”, Paul ignored and dismissed without addressing it. Paul began by refuting the more serious charge of sedition. Paul pointed out the absurdity of the charge. He mentioned that since arriving in Jerusalem, he was there for twelve days. His purpose of going up to Jerusalem was to worship God. His accusers did not find him in the temple discussing with anyone or inciting a rebellion either in the synagogue or in the city (24:12). Paul denied the charge brought against him and demanded material proof for their accusations.<sup>2</sup>

Paul next tackled the charge of heresy or sectarianism. Paul admitted that. But what his accusers called “heresy”; Paul called it “the way”. He was a Christian. He worshipped the “God of my fathers” — a Jewish title for the God of Israel.<sup>3</sup> He believed all things that were written in the Law and in the Prophets (24:14). He had the same hope in God as his accusers had, that is, the resurrection of the dead, both

the righteous and the wicked (24:15). And in view of this resurrection hope in God, he now conscientiously lived a life free of any offence toward God and men (24:16).

Finally, Paul addressed the fourth charge that he profaned the sanctity of the temple. Paul mentioned that after many years away from Jerusalem, he returned to the city on a mission of mercy by bringing love offerings from Gentile churches to his people (24:17). It was in this context that certain Jews from Asia found him performing the rituals of purification in the temple, and there was no crowd or any riot. At this juncture, Paul abruptly asked why the Asiatic Jews were not present in court to press their charges against him! This was a devastating point in Paul’s favour. Roman law was very strict against accusers who abandoned their charges. This was a serious breach of the Roman law. No witnesses, no case. The absence of these witnesses of Paul’s alleged desecration of the temple undermined the Sanhedrin’s case. Paul then turned to Ananias and the Jewish elders present in court to point out what evil he had done, except for the fact that he had been accused of preaching and teaching on “the resurrection of the dead” (24:21). Would the council dare speak up? The Pharisees would approve of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees, no doubt, would think it wrong for Paul to declare his belief in the resurrection of the dead, but would they dare to speak up and accuse Paul publicly for his belief? Paul knew that the majority of Jews had this hope, and he desired nothing more than to have the multitude on his side. It was a masterful defence by Paul!

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<sup>2</sup> A plausible itinerary of Paul’s twelve days in Jerusalem: Arrival in Jerusalem (1); interview with the elders (2); beginning of the seven days of purification; 3) the seven days almost ended and his arrest (4, 5, 6, 7); before the Sanhedrin (8); conspiracy (9); sent to Caesarea (10); brought to Felix (11); in Herod’s Praetorium (11, 12); trial on the fifth day from leaving Jerusalem (13).

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 48:15 And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day,

Exodus 3:15 And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations

Deuteronomy 26:7 And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression. Others: 1 Chronicles 12:17; Ezra 7:27; Daniel 2:23.

### Felix's Foolish Attitude

After hearing the charges brought up by Tertullus on behalf of the Sanhedrin, and Paul's defence that the charges were baseless, Felix did not acquit Paul but adjourn the hearing. Felix had a more exact knowledge concerning the Way because he had been long enough in Judaea to know who the Christians were and what they believed. Moreover, he could also have known about the beliefs of the Jews through his wife, Drusilla who was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I.

He kept Paul under his custody giving the excuse that when Lysias, the military commander should come down, he would know the matter more thoroughly (24:22). There was no evidence that Felix ever called Lysias to Caesarea. It was also unlikely that Lysias could add any more information. Lysias had plainly stated his belief that Paul was not guilty of any crime worthy of the death penalty (23:29). Felix was in a dilemma. Under Roman law, the only verdict was to declare Paul innocent and set him free. If he released Paul, it would infuriate the Jewish leaders, and it might lead to further unrest and troubles. He could not afford that. He was trapped between doing the right thing and the popular thing. So, Felix avoided making a decision. His only option was to postpone his verdict on the pretext that he needed more information.

Felix held Paul in custody. He commanded his centurion to guard Paul closely but to let him have some measure of freedom. Paul had visitors and friends who would come to minister or just to see him. In this regard, Luke, Philip, the deacon and evangelist, and

his four daughters, and other disciples could possibly have visited him.

After several days, Felix came with his young wife, Drusilla, who was a Jewess.<sup>4</sup> He sent for Paul who spoke to him about faith in Jesus Christ (24:24). Paul discussed three things with him. Paul reasoned with him about righteousness, temperance (self-control) and judgement. Righteousness would be the absolute moral standard that God would demand of every one. But all would come short of the righteousness of God. However, faith in Christ would impute in him the righteousness of God without any money. The next thing Paul discussed with him was temperance or self-control. Felix could control almost everything like crushing any rebellion or insurrection, which threatened the *Pax Romana*. But Felix was guilty of being unable to control himself. His third marriage to Drusilla illustrated his lack of self-control. He was under the bondage of sin and hence a slave to sin. And the third thing Paul spoke of was judgement. Judgement would inevitably be the terrible end of man who lives apart from saving faith in Christ. After hearing Paul, Felix trembled; he was fearful. He told Paul to go away until a convenient time in future, when he felt like it, he would call him (24:25). Fear did not lead Felix to repentance. He dismissed Paul. He let a golden opportunity past for the truth is that "*now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Subsequently, Felix summoned Paul often to see him hoping that Paul might bribe him to be set free (24:26). He probably saw Paul had many friends

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<sup>4</sup> Drusilla was Felix's third wife. She divorced her husband, the king of Emesa, a province of Syria, because Felix lured her into marrying him.

who came to visit him, and that they had been able to bring sums of money to Paul. But no bribe was forthcoming. After two years, Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus. Desiring to gain favour from the Jews, Felix left Paul in bonds.

### **Paul's Trials Before Festus**

Porcius Festus was now the new governor of Judaea. He was a man of better character than his predecessor. He was straightforward and honest. He was also a man of action. Three days after he arrived in Caesarea to establish his seat, he went up to Jerusalem. He soon discovered that the high priest and the Jewish leaders were not easy to handle. They too wasted no time to make known to him their accusations against Paul, and looked to him to do something about it. Two years had passed and the Sanhedrin and the Jewish leaders had not forgotten Paul's case. In the meantime, Paul had been incarcerated in Caesarea for those two years. The Jewish leaders quickly capitalised on Festus' inexperience and urged him to send Paul to Jerusalem to stand trial. But that was not their real intention. The truth was that they revived their original conspiracy to ambush Paul and kill him when he was brought up to Jerusalem. But Festus was not so easily duped. He had probably done his homework, during his first three days in Caesarea, before his trip to Jerusalem. Festus saw no reason to transport Paul to Jerusalem. He maintained that Paul should be kept in Caesarea. That was the proper place for Paul to be kept in custody for he was a Roman citizen. Festus added that soon he would return to Caesarea, and if they had anything against Paul, they could go down with him to Caesarea and prosecute Paul there. Festus stayed

in Jerusalem for ten days, and then returned to Caesarea.

The next day, Festus sat "on the judgment seat".<sup>5</sup> Paul was commanded to be brought out. Then the Jews who came down from Jerusalem stood round about him. They brought up all their charges against Paul, presumably the same old ones, but failed to prove them. They still had no witnesses even after two years. On the other hand, Paul defended himself. Paul merely said that he had not committed anything against the law of the Jews, nor had he committed anything against the temple, nor had he committed anything against Caesar. In short, Paul remarked that he was not guilty of any religious evil or political crime. This was the first time that Paul used the name of Caesar in his defence.

Festus faced the same dilemma as his predecessor, Felix. Seeking a way out of the dilemma, he proposed a compromise hoping to please the Jews. He asked Paul whether he would go up to Jerusalem to stand trial before him for all those charges (25:9). Festus decided to make a gesture of goodwill towards the Jews. Festus mentioned that the trial would be before him and not before the Sanhedrin. This was to assure Paul that his rights as a Roman citizen would be protected. Then Paul said, "*I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest*" (25:10). Paul knew the mind of the Jewish leaders very well. The

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<sup>5</sup> Greek "the *bema*" This is the same word used for the "judgment seat of Christ" in Romans 14:10: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the **judgment seat of Christ**."

compromise gave the Jews literally what they wanted. Paul probably remembered the previous plot (23:12), and thought that if the plotters were given another chance, they would not hesitate to ambush and kill him during his transfer to Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders did not care for a trial. They had sworn not to eat or drink until Paul was killed. Hence, Paul rejected Festus' compromise and instead rightly claimed to stand trial before Caesar. This took Festus by surprise for he did not expect Paul's appeal to Caesar. Festus consulted his legal advisers and granted Paul the appeal – "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go" (25:12). The granting of Paul's appeal to Caesar took the case out of the Governor Festus' shoulders and gave him a way out of his dilemma.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

One great lesson from this episode is the truth that Christians are not political revolutionists. Christians are law-abiding citizens like Paul who submitted to the Roman authorities. The real troublemakers were his accusers themselves. They were the ones who stirred up the riots and disturbed the peace of the land. And in today's context, the same is true of charges that have been trumped up against Christians by other religious groups who are against Jesus Christ. When the government of the country takes the side of the anti-Christian groups, many innocent Christians, men, women and children, are mercilessly murdered.

This brings us to another truth and that is the power of sin to bind the sinner. After two years of Paul's

imprisonment in Caesarea, the Jewish leaders' hatred for Paul did not cool down. The Sanhedrin's request to Festus to send Paul to Jerusalem to stand trial seemed innocently harmless. But their evil intent of two years ago still lurked in their wicked hearts and minds. They were under bondage. They must kill Paul.

We learn also of God's providence. It may seem strange to some, if not all, that God did not choose to have Paul rightfully released. Further Paul was unjustly imprisoned for two long quiet years. Why did Felix not release him? Yet Felix gave Paul some measure of liberty. This too was strange. Paul could accept visitors and this freedom facilitated communication with other Christians. At the same time, in the two years, Paul witnessed to Felix and Drusilla. We can be sure that Paul also witnessed to his Roman guards. He might also spend the time reading and studying the Old Testament Scriptures further strengthening his knowledge of God, and drawing a great deal of comfort from God's inspired record of His covenant faithfulness to His chosen people. He would remember the Lord Jesus' promise that he would witness at Rome also (23:11). This indeed tells us about the importance of Bible study and keeping in constant prayerful contact with God.

Lastly, Paul exemplified to us his submission and contentment to God's perfect will. He wrote to encourage the Christians in Philippi (Philippians 4:11-13, 19): *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound*

*and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me . . . But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. AMEN*

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3. What four things did Paul assert in 24:14-16 concerning the Christian faith?

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**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**Monday:** Acts 24:1-9; 1 Peter 2:13-17.

**Tuesday:** Acts 24:10-21; Psalms 12:2-3; Daniel 12:2.

**Wednesday:** Acts 24:22-27; 2 Corinthians 6:2. Romans 1:16, 17.

**Thursday:** Acts 25:1-5; John 15:18-25.

**Friday:** Acts 25:6-12; Philippians 4:12-20.

4. Paul was tossed to and fro between the Jews and the Romans, but what one thing did he fulfil before the various important people and audiences?

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**Discussion Questions**

1. What four charges were brought against Paul by the Jewish advocate, Tertullus?

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5. What privileges did Felix allow Paul as a Roman citizen? When Paul was kept in Caesarea, who might be his friends who came to visit him?

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2. What answer did Paul give to each of Tertullus' four charges against him?

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6. If you were threatened with a lawsuit for defending the Word of God, would you do anything to avert it “so that you will not bring shame to Christ” if it ever go to court?

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7. What did Felix do about the message and not come to any decision about Paul?

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8. What was Festus’ dilemma?

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9 Why did Paul refuse to go to Jerusalem?

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10 Why do you think Paul requested to be tried in Caesar’s court?

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**QUESTION FOR FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY**

1. Describe one or two examples from this lesson that illustrate how God worked through means to bring about His purposes for Paul.
2. How does “working through means” differ from “working through direct intervention”? How do these ways encourage us?