

The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

Chapter 24

24:1-9

The spokesman for the Temple leaders was an attorney named Tertullus. He first flattered Felix, no doubt hoping to gain favor with him. But in so doing, his words demonstrated his inclination to say lies, because his statement in verse 2 that peace and reforms had been attained under Felix, was far from the truth. In fact, dissension was building greatly in Judea and in a short time, Jewish zealots would begin their full-fledged revolt against Rome.

v. 5-6 – Tertullus brought four charges against Paul:

- He was a pest (the same Greek word, *loimos*, was used by Yeshua in Matthew 24:7 to describe the pestilence or plagues that will come on the earth prior to His return). And that was probably the ultimate reason that the Jewish authorities hated him, because like a plague that diminishes the health of a community, Paul had diminished their ability to rule over the religious life of the Jewish people. But being a pest would not be a concern to the Romans.
- So Tertullus added that Paul “stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world.” That would get the attention of Felix because the Romans cared only about *pax Romana* (“peace established by Rome”) and they would always put down anyone who disrupted it.
- The third charge was that Paul was the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. The Greek word translated as “sect” is *hairesis*, which comes from a root meaning “choice.” The Romans did not look favorably upon new religions starting in the empire. And the reason is that it is easier to control people when they maintain the status quo. This is especially relevant in honor/shame cultures in that day, as well as today. It is all about conformity, and that strongly applies to religion. So, the ability to make a personal choice that was different than the status quo was not acceptable to the Romans or institutional Judaism. This concept would be no different in succeeding centuries when the church became institutionalized under Rome, when choices that went against the church were opposed, even to the point of violence. For that reason, the word *hairesis*, originally expressed as a sect, became strengthened in meaning to the English term heresy, which is more of a transliteration, but carries much more of a sense of someone making a very bad choice that is contrary to the accepted beliefs of a religion. And we see that reflected in the way that the KJV translates this same Greek word as “sect” in verse 5 and “heresy” in verse 14.

But up to this point in time, Rome had not distinguished The Way from any other form of Judaism, like the Pharisees or Sadducees. Tertullus was trying to change that perception, and he enhanced it by called Paul the ringleader of the sect. His use of that kind of terminology implied that Paul was beginning a movement that could pose a threat to Rome.

- The last charge was that Paul attempted to desecrate the temple. Never mind that such a claim was untrue. However, that charge would be of interest to Felix because the Romans allowed Jews to worship at the temple as they desired, but they know that any harm to the temple would inflame the passions of the people, and civil unrest would result. So once again, Tertullus was appealing to those things that would be concerns to the Romans

24:10-21

Paul's defense ignored the charge that he was a pest. But he dealt with the other three charges:

- Regarding the charge that he stirred up dissension among the Jews, he simply stated the facts without embellishment and without making it personal. He just said there is no evidence supporting the charge against him that he stirred up dissension (v. 12-13).
- Regarding the charge that he was the ringleader of an illegal sect, he was not ashamed to say that he was a follower of The Way. But He also showed that The Way was consistent with Judaism because he believed in the God of Israel, as well as everything that was in accord with the Torah and the Prophets, including the resurrection, all of which are a part of Judaism (or at least the Pharisaic branch of Judaism because of his belief in the resurrection). Another way of saying that is the Messianic faith *is* Judaism. In fact, it is far closer to biblical Judaism than many of the branches that exist today. But he wasn't a ringleader. That describes someone who imposes his will on others. But Paul did not do that, and he stated that he did his best to maintain a good conscience before God and men. And you can't do that if you are acting like a ringleader (v. 14-16).
- Paul responded to the last charge that he attempted to desecrate the temple by stating that he went about worshiping at the temple just like everyone else. He didn't do anything that attracted a crowd. And the Asian Jews who were source of that charge did not come to Caesarea to give testimony in support of their accusation. Paul admitted that he believed in the resurrection, but that was not uncommon because the Pharisees believed that way (v. 17-21).

Altogether, Paul's defense was candid and truthful and he abided by the legal process. And that serves as an example to all of us when difficulty comes our way.

24:22-27

Felix was now interested in learning more, so he called for Lysias the commander to come and tell what he knew. Felix was also apparently desirous of learning more about The Way, so he brought his Jewish wife Drusilla to talk to Paul about Yeshua. He became frightened when Paul raised issues of righteousness, self-control and judgment in verse 25. That is a natural reaction when you feel guilt about your life. Times like that become a turning point—you can either turn away from your sin in repentance and faith, or you can dismiss the feeling of guilt and continue on living the same way. In this case, Felix took the latter course and only continued seeing Paul with the hope that he would get a bribe. Paul then stayed imprisoned for two years until Felix was replaced as governor by Festus.

In this chapter, you can see the distinction between the morality and actions of the different groups—Paul, as a representative of the Way, religious leaders who claim to be pious but are hypocrites, and corrupt people of the world system. And that describes the exact same circumstances that we find ourselves today. So, we can draw lessons for ourselves from the way that Paul conducted himself, for we, too, represent The Way in a hypocritical and corrupt world.