

Introduction

1. Last week, we saw that in spite of an angry mob's plot to kill Paul, the Lord's providence led to the furtherance of His plan for Paul to witness Him before government rulers
2. The first of those rulers is Felix, the governor of Judea and Samaria
3. At the end of our passage last week, the Roman commander had defeated the Jew's plot to assassinate Paul and successfully delivered him to Felix where he would stand trial
4. I'm going to break our passage today into three parts:
 - a) The first will be the prosecution presenting its case against Paul
 - b) The second is Paul's defense
 - c) And the third is how the governor's abdication of his responsibility provides Paul's with ongoing opportunities to share his faith in Jesus

A. The prosecution presents its case (24:1-9)

1. Paul's accusers arrive before Felix (READ 24:1):
 - a. It was a small delegation:
 - 1) The High Priest, Ananias:
 - a) He was high priest from AD 47-58/59 before he was deposed
 - b) He was a supporter of Rome and it ultimately led to his assassination by an anti-Roman zealot in AD 66 (after he had been removed as high priest)
 - c) According to Josephus, he was a harsh and cruel man, overly rude, disrespectful, and quick tempered—something we saw when he ordered Paul to be punched in the face in Acts 23:5
 - d) He was also known for being corrupt, and this is clearly seen in his willingness to engage in the plot to assassinate Paul (Acts 24:12-15)
 - e) It was for reasons like these that many Jews despised and hated him
 - 2) A small handful of Israel's elders ("**some**"):
 - a) This group of charming fellows wasn't much better than Ananias
 - b) They were part of the 1st plot to assassinate Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 24:12-15)
 - c) They are also likely the "**leading men of the Jews**" mentioned in Acts 25:3 that planned a second attempt to assassinate Paul
 - d) Israel's elders are mentioned over 30 times in the Gospels and Acts and in all but TWO they are portrayed as wicked, corrupt leaders:
 - They constantly opposed Jesus
 - They were involved with concocting the plot to have Jesus arrested, including the bribe to Judas and the mob that arrested Jesus in the Garden
 - They were involved with the unlawful and unjust trial of Jesus
 - They mocked Jesus at His crucifixion
 - They persecuted Christians
 - 3) Tertullus:
 - a) He was the "**attorney**" who presented the charges on behalf of Ananias and the elders

- b) He was there to ensure that their case was presented according to Roman law since this was a formal trial
 - b. Luke doesn't mention any witnesses (false or otherwise), but Roman trials were open to the public and it appears there was a group of Jews there ready to accuse Paul (v. 9)
 - 2. Tertullus begins by flattering the governor with false accolades in an effort to ingratiate himself to the governor and thus sway his ruling (READ 24:2-4):
 - a. He praised him for bringing peace to the region of Judea and Samaria (2b): **“since we through you attained much peace...”**:
 - 1) The reality was far different
 - 2) While Josephus credited Felix for putting down some Jewish Zealots, he also stated that tension between the Jews and the Romans increased during his reign as a result of his harsh tactics
 - 3) There were three major rebellions by the Jews against Rome, the first of which happened in Judea between AD 66-73—just a few years after Felix was removed from office
 - 4) Of all the governors leading up to the first major rebellion, Felix is generally thought of as being the most responsible for stirring up trouble because of his brutal suppression of various Jewish and Samaritan groups (Witherington, P. 705)
 - 5) This man didn't bring peace to Judea and Samaria; if anything, he did quite the opposite
 - b. Next, Tertullus praises the governor for his approach to enforcing Roman law (2c): **“and since by your providence (lit. foresight) reforms are being carried out for this nation”**:
 - 1) This phrase is a reference to how Felix applied the law
 - 2) Roman historian Tacitus referred to Felix as someone with “the power of a king but the mind of a slave”; he also referred to his behavior as “tyrannical”
 - 3) And, what do we know of tyrants when it comes to the law?
 - a) They have disdain for the law; it doesn't apply to them, only others—we see this later when Luke writes that Felix was hoping for a bribe from Paul
 - b) They interpret and apply the law not in the way it is written or intended, but any way that seems fit to them
 - c) They use the law as a weapon against both the guilty and the innocent
- A modern day example of what Tertullus does here in praising Felix for how he used and applied Roman law, would be to praise the Biden administration for its approach to U.S. immigration law
- 4) Felix's approach to the law was something Tertullus said was **“acknowledged in every way and everywhere...with all thankfulness”** by the Jewish leaders (gee, I wonder why)
 - 5) Ultimately, Felix was removed from office, tried, and convicted because of his corruption and disregard for the law
 - c. Finally, Tertullus pours on the charm one last time (4): **“But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant to us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.”**
 - d. All of this flattery is designed to do one thing: play on the arrogance and pride of the governor in an effort to secure a favorable ruling

3. We finally get to the charges they bring against Paul—and there are two of them (24:5-9):
 - a. The first charge is that Paul was stirring up Jews to rebel against Rome (READ 24:5a):
 - 1) They refer to him as a “**pest**”—more literally they call him a “**plague**” which is a contagious disease (I almost wonder if Paul secretly considered this a compliment)
 - 2) He was stirring up “**dissension (lit. rebellion) among all the Jews throughout the world**”, and it’s implied here that the rebellion is against Rome
 - 3) Not only was he leading the Jews to rebel, he was a leader of a dangerous heretical cult (24:5b): “**a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes**”:
 - a) The word “sect” here technically refers to a division or group of people that share similar religious convictions—essentially a religious party (there were sects within Judaism, Pharisees and Sadducees, just as there are sects within Christianity, Catholics, Baptists, Lutherans)
 - b) However, Tertullus is using it in a disparaging way to refer to Christians as an unaccepted, unauthorized, heretical religious cult that wanted to overthrow Rome
 - b. The second charge is that Paul had attempted to desecrate the temple (READ 24:6-8)—a couple things to note here:
 - 1) The first is that most English translations do not include the second half of verse 6, all of 7, and the first part of 8—the reason is that it’s only found in a few manuscripts and not the earliest or most reliable
 - 2) The second is this: did you notice how here they claim that Paul “**tried to desecrate the temple**” but back in 21:28 they claimed he had defiled it—it’s funny how difficult it is to keep the story straight when it’s based on a lie
 - c. Ultimately, they were convinced that the governor would rule in their favor (READ 24:9-10)
4. All of this was intended to portray Paul as a powerful and influential threat and enemy to Rome:
 - a. There was already rising tension between the Jews and Rome
 - b. Felix had already put down several small Jewish rebellions, and the large 4000 person rebellion a few years earlier led by the Egyptian mentioned by the Roman commander in Acts 21:38
 - c. If they could convince the governor that Paul was leading a rebellion against Rome, he would be executed by Rome
 - d. However, if the best they could do was convince him that Paul had desecrated the temple, then he would be forced to release Paul into their custody to keep the peace with the Jews, and end result would also be his execution (something permitted by Rome for defiling the temple)
5. Takeaway: in the same way that Paul was portrayed as an enemy of the state (Rome) and Jewish religion, most Christian persecution around the world today is carried out under the guise of being an enemy of the state or the dominant religion (generally Islam):
 - a. Secular countries like North Korea and China have openly declared Christianity a threat:
 - 1) In North Korea, when someone is found to be a Christian, they are either killed or arrested and locked up in one of their notorious labor camps, and often their families and even descendants (to the fourth generation) face the same fate
 - 2) In China, the CCP under President Xi has been carrying out a plan to eradicate Christianity and other minority religions through a process called sinicization:

- a) This refers to transforming religious beliefs, faith, practice, and rituals in accordance with Chinese communist propaganda
 - b) They've done this by forcing churches to register with the state, bulldozing 1000s of church buildings, removing crosses and pictures of Jesus from other churches, raiding home churches, arresting and torturing church pastors and leaders, dictating sermons, banning the Bible, Christian literature, broadcasts, and websites, etc.
- b. The same is true of countries dominated by Islam and Hinduism:
- 1) Christians face severe persecution in countries like Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen, and Iran because they are considered a threat to Islam—in fact, the Malaysia government published a 130 page book last March entitled, “Exposing the Christian Agenda”
 - 2) Christians are experiencing unprecedented persecution in the second largest county in the world, India, both by the government and general population because they are seen as a threat to Hinduism
- c. And lest we think it's not happening here: What have we seen recently?
- 1) Back under President Obama's administration, the Department of Defense was caught training U.S. troops that Catholics, Jews, and evangelical Christians were “religious extremists” and equated them with violent groups like al-Qaeda, the KKK, and Hamas
 - 2) At the same time, the US Department of Homeland Security funded two studies that listed Christians as “perpetrators of terrorism”
 - 3) The proposed Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act of 2021 calls for law-enforcement to monitor what the government considers “right-wing” groups which include Christian conservatives and evangelicals; those opposed to abortion, homosexuality and transgenderism, and critical race theory; those who believe in individual liberty and are opposed to government overreach
 - 4) We saw this a few months ago when U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland and the DOJ released a memo likening parents who opposed the teaching of CRT and LGBTQ issues in public school to domestic terrorists, and declared that the FBI, U.S. Attorney's office and other law enforcement leaders would immediately start targeting parents who speak up at school board meetings (most of whom are likely Christians)
 - 5) I mentioned a few weeks ago how many in the liberal media are claiming that Christians are destroying the public school system and society, blaming us for everything from the spread of Covid, to racism, to climate change

B. Paul presents his defense (24:10-21)

- 1. Paul responds to their charge of stirring up rebellion (READ 24:10-13):
 - a. He begins by asserting that the governor could verify himself that Paul had gone up to Jerusalem just 12 days earlier to worship
 - b. He asserted that at no time during those 12 days did his accusers find him “**carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot**”—not in the temple, not in the synagogues, and not anywhere in the city itself
 - c. Their charge that he was a plague stirring up the masses to revolt against Rome was baseless and they couldn't prove otherwise—in part because it never happened, but they also failed to produce any witnesses!

2. He then responds to their charge of being a ringleader of a heretical sect (READ 24:14-16):
 - a. In a move that likely stunned his accusers, and maybe even Felix himself, Paul confesses to being a Christian:
 - 1) His accusers had referred to Christians with a derogatory phrase, “**the sect of the Nazarenes**”, (24:5), but Paul uses a more common phrase, “**The Way**” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22)
 - 2) But, rather than being a heretical sect, Paul establishes that The Way shares a number of things in common with the Jews:
 - a) As a member of the Way, He served the same God as the Jews (“**the God of our fathers**”)
 - b) Contrary to their false claims, he believed “**everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets**”
 - c) He also shared the same hope in God that the Jews did: “**that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked**”
 - b. Their claim that Paul was the leader of a dangerous and heretical cult was intended to malign him and cause suspicion, but Paul turned this accusation on its head by claiming that it was precisely because he was a follower of The Way that he was motivated “**to do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.**” (16)
3. Finally, Paul responds to the charge that he tried to desecrate the temple (READ 24:17-21):
 - a. Like he did regarding The Way, Paul confesses that he was indeed in the temple, but for the purpose of presenting alms and offerings, and the Jews witnessed him doing just this “**without any crowd or uproar**”
 - b. The only ones to accuse him otherwise were “**some Jews from Asia**”—if they had anything against Paul they should have been the ones standing before Felix, but they were absent
 - c. In a final brilliant move, Paul suggests to Felix that those who were there to accuse him (Ananias, the elders, and Tertullus) should reveal what happened during their own Council hearing in Jerusalem (RE-READ 20-22):
 - 1) In essence, their own Council couldn’t even agree among themselves whether Paul was guilty of anything
 - 2) In fact, some even believed he was innocent!
4. Takeaway: while Paul defended himself against the false accusations, he didn’t shy away from proudly declaring himself a Christian:
 - a. In fact, he made a special point of drawing attention to it!
 - b. When faced with persecution we have a choice—are we going to compromise our values, principles, or doctrine as some have done, or are we going to own up to it?

C. The judge abdicates his responsibility, but it provides Paul with opportunities to share the Gospel (24:22-27)

1. Instead of issuing a ruling, the governor orders that Paul be kept in custody for an unspecified amount of time (READ 24:22-23):
 - a. He is more familiar with The Way than Paul’s accusers, and apparently rejects their claims that Paul’s association with the Way makes him a threat to Rome
 - b. He claims that he will issue his ruling once Lysias, the commander who sent Paul to him, arrives:

- 1) This was likely a ruse or a delay tactic because Lysias never came
 - 2) There is no indication that Lysias had any intention to come to Caesarea, nor that Felix had summoned him
 - 3) Plus, Felix already knew how Lysias felt about the case because the commander put it all in the letter he sent along with Paul
 - 4) We also find out later that Felix had other motives in keeping Paul in custody
- c. In the meantime, he orders that Paul be kept in custody but with some freedom and the ability to be ministered to by his friends (likely in the governor's mansion; Acts 23:35)
2. What seems like another miscarriage of justice for Paul, actually resulted in ongoing opportunities for Paul to share the Gospel with Governor Felix (READ 24:24-27):
- a. Because he was governor over all of Judea and Samaria, Felix traveled around the region
 - b. However, whenever he returned to Caesarea, he would summon Paul and engage in conversation about his faith:
 - 1) On his first visit, he arrived with his Jewish wife, summoned Paul and allowed him to speak about his faith in Christ Jesus (24):
 - a) Look at the depth in which Paul was able to go—he discussed righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come
 - b) It was enough to frighten Felix and cause him to send Paul away, but only temporarily until he would summon him again
 - 2) On subsequent visits, he would “**send for [Paul] quite often and converse with him**”—these were two-way conversations
 - 3) Felix had ulterior motives in that he was hoping Paul would offer him a bribe, but it provided Paul with plenty of opportunities to witness Jesus before the governor just as Jesus told him that he would
 - 4) And, this went on for TWO YEARS!
3. Takeaway: Paul faced injustice, but he took advantage of that injustice and turned it into an opportunity to talk about his faith in Jesus:
- a. How is the American Christian Church responding to the growing disdain and persecution we are facing?
 - b. Are we responding with hate, vitriol, violence? Or are we loving our enemies like Jesus commanded and taking advantage of the injustices to talk about our faith in Jesus?