

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

An Exposition

by

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The account of the trial of the Apostle Paul before the Governor Felix and how this trial terminated is reported in this chapter.

- I. The indictment of Paul** (Verses 1-9).
- II. The defence of the Apostle** (Verses 10-21).
- III. How Felix disposed of the case** (Verses 22-23).
- IV. Paul addresses Felix** (Verses 24-27).

### **I. The indictment of Paul.**

**“And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence. We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands. Commanding his accusers to come unto thee; by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so”** (Verses 1-9).

If the Jews, after Paul’s removal from Jerusalem, had not pressed the case against him, he would have been liberated. As he had gone years ago to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, so now the Jews follow him to Cesarea to accuse him before the Roman governor. They evidently did not lose any time. Only a few days had elapsed when a strong deputation from Jerusalem appeared in Cesarea.

The high priest filled with much hatred against Paul had taken it upon himself to come in person. This must have been an unusual occurrence for a person of Ananias' standing to leave Jerusalem. He came not alone but brought with him the elders and a professional Roman lawyer Tertullus. No doubt the scheme of indictment was cleverly laid and the high priest must have counted much on his personal presence and on the eloquence of the hired lawyer. God was left out completely.

The address of Tertullus is characteristically Roman. He pays a flattering tribute to Felix, which however fell on barren ground. That official knew well the hollowness of these compliments.

The words Tertullus used against the great man of God are extremely vile and manifest the hiss of the serpent. He calls him "**a pestilent fellow,**" *a person of whom society may well be rid of.*

The indictment contains three counts.

*First stands a political accusation.* This, in presence of the high Roman officer, was of the greatest importance. Any conspiracy against the Roman government was a capital offence. The charge of sedition or treason was thus at once laid at the door of the Apostle.

*The second offence Tertullus brought against Paul was of a religious nature.* As ringleader of the Nazarenes, presented by him as a sect of the Jews, he had abetted that which was against the peace of Judaism and introduced not alone a disturbing element, but had transgressed another Roman law, which forbade the introduction of unrecognized religious sects.

*The third charge was the profanation of the temple.* If this last charge could have been proven against Paul the sentence of death would have fallen against him.

The address of Tertullus is most likely not reported in full. There is a difficulty about the words "**and would have judged according to our law, but the chief captain Lysias came upon us and with great violence took him away out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come unto thee.**"

In some of the oldest manuscripts these words are not found; in the manuscripts in which they are found variations occur. The critical school has ruled them out. The chief reason given besides the textual difficulty is because the Jews would not have accused Lysias.

We believe the words are genuine and that they belong in the text. If they are omitted the words "**by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things whereof we accuse him**" must be applied to Paul. But that was against Roman customs that the judge should be referred to the prisoner. If they are not omitted then Tertullus meant that Lysias should himself be examined.

Verse 22 settles the difficulty. Felix said that he would delay his decision till Lysias would arrive.

When Tertullus had completed his speech, the Jews, Ananias and his elders fully endorsed the statements of their lawyer.

## II. The defence of the Apostle.

**“Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had aught against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me while I stood before the council, Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day”** (Verses 10-21).

For the third time in the history of this book, Paul addresses a Roman officer of high rank, Gallio and Sergius Paulus were the others. His defense is masterly.

The Spirit of God helped him now as he faced his cunning accusers and his judge. No flattery is used by him. Any kind of flattery is unworthy of a Christian. The flattering tongue is the serpent's tongue.

- **“A flattering mouth worketh ruin”** (Proverbs 26:28).
- **“A man that flattereth with his tongue spreadeth a net for his feet”** (Proverbs 29:5).
- **“The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips”** (Psalm 12:3).

Paul only refers to the fact that Felix was a judge appointed over the nation for many years. His innocence is apparent in the cheerful manner in which he begins his defence.

His address contains:

- A denial of the first charge;
- A confession and admission concerning the second, and
- A complete vindication of the accusation of the temple profanation.

He points first of all to the fact that only twelve days had elapsed since his arrival in Jerusalem and that he did not go there to cause an insurrection against the Roman authorities, but to worship. He did not congregate a crowd. He did not dispute openly (as Stephen did) nor did he incite the Jews in the synagogues or in the city to rebellion. Boldly he asserts that they have no proof whatever against him as a political offender.

But it was different with the second count of Tertullus' indictment. Here he admits the fact that **"the way"** which they call heresy, faith in Christ, is his way of worshipping the God of his fathers. But this way did not change his belief in the law and the prophets, as the accusation might have implied.

Then he speaks of hope toward God, the resurrection of the dead, both the just and the unjust. He also testifies of his own life and walk as a believer in the way in which he served God. He had used self-discipline to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men. The great truth he held and for which he had been imprisoned, resulted in a righteous life. In a brief word, he speaks of his own love for the nation, and states one of the purposes of his visit to Jerusalem to bring alms and offerings to his nation. How simple, yet masterly, all this was put.

But the last charge had to be refuted.

The falsity of what Tertullus had accused him he proves in a few well-chosen words. He had been in the temple, but not to profane it. There was no multitude; there was no tumult from his side. No witnesses were present to substantiate the charge of the profanation of the temple. He even appealed to Ananias and the elders to speak if any evil had been found in him when he had appeared before the Council. He readily owns the statement he had made touching resurrection, the words which precipitated the riot. He had proven the injustice of the charges and by his honest admissions demonstrated his innocence.

### **III. How Felix disposed of the case.**

**"And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him"** (Verses 22-23).

Felix had more perfect knowledge of the way. He was acquainted with the truths concerning Christ and with Christianity, though he himself was not walking in the way. He knew that the accusations were not true. He refuses a decision. Justice demanded that Paul should be set at liberty. However, Felix defers it all to the time when Lysias, the chief captain, came to Cesarea. But Lysias never showed up. Paul was kept a prisoner. A second hearing before Felix he never received; but Felix heard Paul, as we read in the concluding paragraph of this chapter.

### **IV. Paul addresses Felix.**

**"And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But, after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound"** (Verses 24-27).

Felix was married three times. His wife, Drusilla, mentioned here, was a daughter of Herod, that is Agrippa I, who slew James. Drusilla's brother was the Agrippa mentioned in the twenty-sixth chapter of our book. Drusilla had been married to the King of Emesa. She had abandoned him for Felix, and was at that time not yet 20 years old. According to some authorities it was she who expressed the desire to hear the Apostle speak concerning the faith of Christ. No doubt it was mere curiosity, if not to ridicule the servant of the Lord. Where the audience took place is not stated.

Paul knew undoubtedly Felix and Drusilla's history. The prisoner becomes judge. Instead of satisfying their curiosity, he speaks boldly truths concerning righteousness, temperance and judgment to come which uncovered the wicked doings of the pair and touched the conscience of Felix. He trembled as he saw his heart laid bare and got a glimpse of judgment to come. He refused the solemn message and therefore Paul could not present to him the blessed Gospel.

The address of Paul was not completed. Felix broke it off and dismissed the preacher with that familiar excuse, which has led countless souls to eternal ruin, "**when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.**"

He did send often for him and communed with him, but it was not to learn the way of life. He expected a bribe from Paul so that he might purchase his liberty. The Apostle remained a prisoner in Cesarea for two years. No doubt during this time he enjoyed the fellowship of the saints. Besides Luke, Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with Paul. We doubt not with the liberty granted unto the Apostle he had many opportunities to minister the Word. Perhaps it was during these two years that Luke, the beloved physician, was moved to write the Gospel record which bears his name and which was addressed to Theophilus.

Felix left Paul behind as prisoner, thinking to show the Jews a favor. Porcius Festus became governor in the place of Felix.

~ end of chapter 24 ~

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