

The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

Lesson 69 – Acts 21-28 – In Defense Part 4

INTRODUCTION / REVIEW

Continuing our journey through the Book of Acts, Chapters 24-26 form a pivotal section in the narrative of Paul's imprisonment and trials. These chapters detail Paul's formal defenses before Roman provincial authorities in Caesarea. First, before the corrupt procurator Antonius Felix, then before his successor Porcius Festus, and finally in a more elaborate hearing before King Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice. This sequence builds on the chaotic events of Acts 21-23, where Paul's arrival in Jerusalem led to his arrest amid **false** accusations of temple defilement and anti-Law teaching. Roman intervention saved his life, but his Roman citizenship granted him protections that shifted his case from the volatile streets of Jerusalem to the more structured (though still politically charged) courts of Caesarea.

Review from our previous lessons: In Acts 21, Paul's strategic participation in a purification rite aimed to dispel rumors among Jewish believers that he opposed the Law, but it failed to help when Jews from Ephesus stirred a mob, falsely claiming he had brought a Gentile into the temple. Roman commander Claudius Lysias arrested him, mistaking him initially for an Egyptian rebel leader. Paul's invocation of his citizenship halted a scourging, and his nephew's warning foiled a Jewish assassination plot, leading to his transfer to Caesarea under heavy guard (Acts 23:23-35). There, he awaited trial under Felix.

Luke's emphasis here is not merely on legal proceedings but on how God uses opposition to advance the gospel. Each defense becomes an evangelistic platform, where Paul pivots from self-vindication to proclaiming Jesus' resurrection and the hope of Israel.

Our exposition today will unpack chapters 24-26. This lengthy trial sequence (spanning about two years) shows Paul's unyielding boldness, turning chains into a pulpit.

ACTS 24:1-9 – THE ACCUSATION BEFORE FELIX

After a five-day delay, Ananias the high priest arrives in Caesarea with elders and a hired orator, Tertullus (v. 1). Tertullus, likely a professional Jewish rhetorician trained in Greco-Roman style, presents the case against Paul to Procurator Felix.

Key Textual Details:

- **Flattery's Structure (2-3):** Tertullus begins with lavish praise; "much peace" and "reforms," ironic given Felix's notorious corruption. This was a standard argumentation technique in Roman courts to curry favor.
- **Three Charges (5-6a):** (1) Paul as a "pest" (λοιμός loimos). They are calling him a plague; (2) Leader of the "sect of the Nazarenes" (deriving from Jesus of Nazareth, an early pejorative term for Christians); (3) Attempted temple desecration. These echo the mob's cries in Acts 21:28 and frame Paul as a Jewish problem, so that he would be released from Roman imprisonment (protection).

The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

Lesson 69 – Acts 21-28 – In Defense Part 4

- **Incomplete Narrative (6b-9):** The text abruptly shifts to the commander's intervention, with Tertullus claiming Paul was caught "in the act. Obviously, this is a lie. The Jews that are referred to here are Ananias and some Elders.

Historical Context: Caesarea's praetorium (governor's palace) was a large and grandiose structure, ideal for such hearings. Felix, as procurator, held authority but often deferred to local customs for non-capital cases. Jewish leaders' journey from Jerusalem (100+ miles) shows their determination to get Paul back under their jurisdiction. They did not just want Paul out of Jerusalem; they wanted him dead.

ACTS 24:10-21 – PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE FELIX

Paul's response (10-21) is concise yet pointed, beginning with polite brevity ("since I have been given a hearing"). He dismantles the charges systematically, emphasizing innocence and doctrine over drama.

Textual Analysis:

- **Greeting and Timeline (10-11):** Paul's "not many days ago" counters Tertullus's "for many years" (17), grounding events in recent history (12 days total in Jerusalem, per Acts 24:11).
- **Charge 1: Public Order (12-13):** Paul affirms open worship in the temple and synagogues, with "no crowd" or "riot."
- **Charge 2: Being a Sect (14-15):** He embraces "the Way" as true Judaism, affirming "the Law and the Prophets" and the resurrection hope ("just and unjust," echoing Daniel 12:2). This universal resurrection (not just believers) ties to Paul's Pharisaic roots, making "the Way" a fulfillment, not an aberration, of Judaism.
- **Charge 3: Temple Profanation (16-19):** Paul begins with clarifying that he has a "blameless conscience," then recounts alms and offerings (consistent with his collection for Jerusalem's poor, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; Romans 15:25-27), interrupted by "Jews from Asia (Ephesus)" absent accusers who should be there.

Rhetorical Strategy: Paul avoids aggression, using understatement ("I cheerfully admit") to disarm. He shifts from legal defense to witness for the message of Jesus Christ.

ACTS 24:22-27 – FELIX'S DELAY AND PRIVATE HEARINGS

Felix, "well informed" about the Way (v. 22, from his Jewish wife Drusilla and prior cases?), adjourns, promising Lysias's input. Paul gets "some liberty" (v. 23), with soldier custody and family access—lenient for a sedition charge.

- **Private Audiences (24-25):** Felix and Drusilla (Agrippa I's daughter, married to Felix - AD 54) summon Paul often. His talk on "righteousness, self-control, and judgment" alarms Felix, who deflects with "Go, until I have opportunity."

The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

Lesson 69 – Acts 21-28 – In Defense Part 4

- **Corruption Exposed (26-27):** Felix hopes for a bribe, conversing "frequently" while keeping Paul chained for two years. This delay wasn't justice but greed, hoping to get a bribe.

Historical Note: Felix's recall stemmed from Samaritan complaints; his brother Pallas's influence saved him from trial.

ACTS 25:1-12 – FESTUS TAKES OVER; APPEAL TO CAESAR

Porcius Festus arrives in AD 59. Jews urge reopening Paul's case in Jerusalem, a trap for ambush. Festus capitulates and has them send men with him for transport to Jerusalem.

- **Hearing (6-8):** After 8-10 days, Paul denies offenses against the Law, temple, or Caesar.
- **Jerusalem Ploy Rejected (9-11):** Festus, seeking to "do the Jews a favor," indicates that he was about to transfer Paul to Jerusalem. Paul understands the situation and appeals to Caesar (a citizen's right under law). Festus confers with the council, and his hands are tied; Paul will go to Caesar.

ACTS 25:13-22 – FESTUS CONSULTS AGRIPPA II

Festus briefs visiting Agrippa II and Bernice (13-14) on Paul's "troublesome" case, Jews' death demands despite no capital crime (18-19: "questions about their own religion, about Jesus, and the resurrection"). Agrippa, intrigued, requests a hearing.

Festus changes his tone, and the way that he is speaking to Agrippa indicates that he did not want to admit that he was going to get into the Jews. He downplays his role in the plot, probably to avoid any accusations of impropriety.

Review of Agrippa II

King Herod Agrippa II is the last of the Herodian dynasty's rulers in Judea. Agrippa II (born AD 27-28, ceremonially ruled Judea) was the great-grandson of Herod the Great and son of Agrippa I (who executed James and imprisoned Peter in Acts 12). Educated in Rome, he was "granted" territories including Chalcis, Galilee, and Perea by Emperor Claudius and later expanded by Nero. Agrippa II was a Roman client king, loyal to the empire, and known for his expertise in Jewish customs and temple affairs; he even appointed high priests. Tacitus and Josephus describe him as urbane but ineffective in quelling Jewish revolts, ultimately fleeing Jerusalem during the 66-70 war. In Acts 25-26, he appears with his sister Bernice (a controversial figure due to their incestuous rumors, per Josephus). Agrippa's knowledge makes him an ideal audience for Paul's most detailed testimony, highlighting divine irony: a Herodian hears the gospel from the Apostle of Jesus, who was persecuted by his ancestors.

The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

Lesson 69 – Acts 21-28 – In Defense Part 4

ACTS 25:23-27 – PAUL SET BEFORE AGRIPPA

Dramatic scene: Agrippa and Bernice enter "in great pomp" with thousands of attendants and military presence. Festus's platform demonstrates who is really in control.

ACTS 26:1-32 – PAUL'S FULL TESTIMONY TO AGRIPPA

Paul's longest defense (29 verses) is semi-formal, before an expert audience. He extends a hand (orator's gesture), thanks Agrippa ("expert in all customs and controversies"), and launches into autobiography.

Textual Breakdown:

- **Background as Pharisee (4-8):** Public life verifiable; strict Pharisee; imprisoned saints. Ties to "hope of Israel" (Patriarchal promises) and resurrection.
- **Damascus Vision (9-18):** Persecution details (10-11: votes for death, prisons); Jesus' Intervention (12-14, "kick against goads," proverb for futile resistance); commission to Gentiles (17-18: open eyes, turn darkness to light – Isaiah 42:7).
- **Obedience and Imprisonment (19-23):** Preached immediately (19-20: repentance/works); thus arrested (Jews' plot); helped by God (Moses/Prophets testify of the suffering Messiah, resurrection, and light to Jews and the Gentiles).
- **Interruption and Climax (24-29):** Festus: "You are out of your mind!" Paul: I am not! I speak truth. To Agrippa: You know this. Agrippa: "In a little...I will do Christianity" (en oligo, "in little." What does this mean briefly, or nearly?). What is Agrippa saying? Sarcasm? Genuine?
- **Agrippa's Judgment (30-32):** Paul is innocent; release possible if he had not appealed.

CONCLUSION

Acts 24-26 masterfully weaves legal drama with gospel proclamation, showing Paul's defenses as unhindered witnesses. Before Felix, he demonstrates patience while giving truth whenever called upon; with Festus, he sees through a trap and secures safety and transportation to Rome; to Agrippa, his testimony fulfills prophecy, turning a Herodian court into a mission field.

Paul's imprisonment propels the message, modeling how trials authenticate truth. As we transition to the voyage (Chapter 27), we see God's protection upon Paul, and the Gospel continues to spread.