

CONCERNING THE WAY

May 18, 2010

LESSON 102: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



Since we stopped the last lesson in the middle of the story, let's start with the passages from the last chapter to set up what happens in this lesson.

Acts 21:27-29 When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, seeing Paul in the temple, stirred up a large crowd. They grabbed Paul, (28) yelling, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere to turn against our people, the law, and this place. More than that, he has even brought Greeks into the temple and desecrated this holy place." (29) For they had earlier seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him and assumed that Paul had taken him into the temple.

Acts 21:30-32 The whole city was in chaos. The people rushed together, grabbed Paul, dragged him out of the temple, and at once the doors were sealed shut. (31) The crowd was trying to kill Paul when a report reached the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. (32) Immediately the tribune took some soldiers and officers and ran down to the crowd. When the people saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

Acts 21:33-36 Then the tribune came up, grabbed Paul, and ordered him to be tied up with two chains. He then asked who Paul was and what he had done. (34) Some of the crowd shouted this and some that. Since the tribune couldn't learn the facts due to the confusion, he ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. (35) When Paul got to the steps, he had to be carried by the soldiers because the mob had become so violent. (36) The crowd of people kept following him and shouting, "Kill him!"

Acts 21:37-39 Just as Paul was about to be taken into the barracks, he asked the tribune, "May I say something to you?" The tribune asked, "Oh, do you speak Greek? (38) You're not the Egyptian who started a revolt some time ago and led 4,000 assassins into the desert, are you?" (39) Paul replied, "I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city. Please let me speak to the people."

Acts 21:40 The tribune gave him permission, and Paul, standing on the steps, motioned for the people to be silent. When everyone had quieted down, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language:

Chapter 22

Paul now makes his defense. This is the first of several speeches Paul would make in his "defense": (also Acts 24:10, 25:8, 25:16, 26:1).

Acts 22:1-3 "Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense that I am now making before you." (2) When they heard him speaking to them in Hebrew, they became even more quiet, and he continued: (3) "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia but raised in this city and educated at the feet of Gamaliel in the strict ways of our ancestral law. I am as

zealous for God as all of you are today.

This is the main reason Paul was driven by the Holy Spirit to Jerusalem, so he would be captured and imprisoned and given opportunities to preach the gospel to all sorts of people he would not have been able to reach otherwise, beginning with this crowd of Jews on the temple mount.

Back in chapter 5 we talked about the fact that Paul had studied to be a Pharisee under one of the most renowned scholars and teachers in Jewish history, Gamaliel. He would have come to Jerusalem at a young age to begin his education. Paul is pointing out that he was not an apostate Jew, and there was no one there that could have been more zealous for God and the Torah than he was.

Acts 22:4-5 **I persecuted this Way, even executing people, and kept tying up both men and women and putting them in prison, (5) as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I was going there to tie up those who were there and bring them back to Jerusalem to be punished.**

"The Way" was the most familiar way to describe the Christian faith back then, for the believers it was like a code word for the "Right Way", as opposed to the "Wrong Way". But the unbelieving crowd knew what he was talking about.

The "whole council of elders" is the Sanhedrin, the 70 member group that was the highest legal, legislative, and judicial body among the Jews.

Acts 22:6-11 **"But while I was on my way and approaching Damascus about noon, a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. (7) I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?' (8) "I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' "He said to me, 'I am Jesus from Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' (9) The men who were with me saw the light but didn't understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. (10) "Then I asked, 'What am I to do, Lord?' "The Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything you are destined to do.' (11) Since I could not see because of the brightness of the light, the men who were with me took me by the hand and led me into Damascus.**

We studied this event back in chapter 9, so we won't cover all that again, but I remind you, from what Jesus told Paul in verse 10, that Paul was chosen by God long before this event. He was born to serve God in the ways that we have seen so far in Acts. Paul was driven before this event to defend Judaism, and it took a dramatic intervention by God on the road to Damascus to turn him around. Now Paul is driven to preach the truth about Jesus Christ.

Acts 22:12-16 **"A certain Ananias, who was a devout man with respect to the law and who was highly regarded by all the Jews living there, (13) came to me. He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' At that moment I could see him. (14) "Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear his own voice, (15) because you will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. (16) What are you waiting for now? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away as you call on his name.'**

God used other people, like this godly man Ananias, who was willing to risk his life to minister to Paul, who just before this was bound to capture and punish men like Ananias. These verses tell us more about Ananias than we learned in Acts 9, that he was devout and highly regarded by all the Jews in

Damascus. Ananias confirmed to Paul what was happening to him, what God's plan was for him.

Ananias uses the term "the Righteous One" here for Jesus, and that is a very Messianic term that comes from Isaiah's Suffering Servant prophecy (Isaiah 53:11).

Verse 16 makes us ask the question, "When was Paul saved—on the Damascus Road or at Judas' house with Ananias? There are several reasons to believe he was saved on the Damascus Road:

- (1) The gospel was presented to him directly by Christ (Galatians 1:11-12), not later by Ananias.
- (2) Paul had already said he had submitted in faith to Christ (Acts 22:10).
- (3) Paul was filled with the Spirit before his baptism with water (9:17-18).
- (4) The Greek word *epikalesamenos*, translated "calling on His name" refers either to action which is at the same time as or before that of the main verb. So Paul's calling on Christ's name (for salvation) came before his water baptism. It could be translated, "having called on His name."

Some have used this verse to try to say that you must be baptized to be saved. But it is actually saying that the calling upon His name and the confession of sins comes first and then the baptism after that as an expression of Paul's sins being washed away. The former interpretation would also contradict the many other scriptures that salvation comes solely from believing that Jesus Christ is Messiah (Acts 3:19, 5:31, 8:22, 10:43-44, 11:19, 13:24, 17:30, 19:4, 20:21, 26:18-20, John 3:16, 36, Romans 11:6, Ephesians 2:8-9).

Acts 22:17-21 "Then I returned to Jerusalem. While I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance (18) and saw the Lord saying to me, 'Hurry up and get out of Jerusalem at once, because the people won't accept your testimony about me.' (19) "I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I kept imprisoning and beating those who believe in you. (20) Even when the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I was standing there approving it and guarding the coats of those who were killing him.' (21) "Then he said to me, 'Go, because I will send you far away to the gentiles.'"

We see here that Paul returned to Jerusalem from Damascus. He didn't immediately start speaking about what had happened to him, but he went to the temple to pray, probably still trying to understand it all. And Jesus comes to him and tells him to get out of Dodge. Incredibly, Paul argues with Jesus! You can see that Jesus told him early on that his main mission would be to the Gentiles. So Paul knew all along that this was his mission, but he never gave up trying to reach his Jewish brothers with the truth of Jesus Christ. Now Paul referred to Stephen as "your witness", and he himself had also become a witness. His reversal was now complete.

Acts 22:22-24 Up to this point they listened to him, but then they began to shout, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! He's not fit to go on living!" (23) While they were yelling, tossing their coats around, and throwing dirt into the air, (24) the tribune ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks and told the soldiers to beat and question him in order to find out why the people were yelling at him like this.

What infuriated the mob was that he was saying Jews and Gentiles were equal in the sight of God without the Law of Moses (Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:2-6; Galatians 3:28). The fact that the Gentiles could come to God directly by faith in Jesus Christ was offensive to them. Tossing their coats around

probably meant they were getting ready to stone Paul. Throwing dirt in the air was a Jewish (and Arabic) reaction to hearing something very disturbing and offensive.

Mention of his mission to the Gentiles sent the listening Jewish crowd into a frenzy, and they didn't let Paul go any further. The Roman guard could not understand what was causing this uproar, so, being Roman soldiers, they just figured they would get the answers from Paul by beating him. The beating would be done by lashing Paul with a whip made of leather straps with pieces of metal or bone attached to the ends. This was a customary method under the Roman legal system of getting confessions or information from prisoners who were not Roman citizens.

We can ask this question again and again – why did the majority of the Jews reject Christ? Why did they hate Him so much? They had it all. They were given the revelation from God. They were given the prophets. They were given the covenants. They were set apart to be His people like no other race. They were chosen to be the race through which the Messiah came.

Well, by this time in history it had become just a religion, and like most religions it created many people (not all, mind you) who became self-righteous because they obeyed the rules of that religion. They had come to think that, simply because they were Jews, that were all right. They were saved. Because they did what their religion required, they thought that they were pleasing to God and they became proud. Only they weren't pleasing to God.

They were living their lives pretty much as they pleased, and if they happened to break the Law, well that was OK, they just had to make sure they made their sacrifice at the temple to cover over that sin. There was no real repentance, no real relationship with God. It was just a set of rules and rituals to follow and if you did, you felt good about yourself. And like most religions, if anyone threatened that system, they were attacked mercilessly.

This response by the Jews is important to the argument of the Book of Acts. It shows that the Jews in Jerusalem had permanently refused the gospel of Jesus Christ and had sealed their fate. Less than 20 years later in A.D. 70 the city of Jerusalem was reduced to rubble and ruin (see Jesus' prophecy of this in Matthew 24:1-2; 21:41; 22:7). This, of course, does not mean Israel will not be restored in the future (Romans 11:26).

When Paul started talking about Jesus dying for their sins, and they needed to accept Him as their Savior, that was very threatening. People, Jew or Gentile, don't want to talk about their sin, and they don't want to admit they need a Savior. They would rather be saved by following a set of rules and rituals.

Well, this is not much different than the way many people are today. Many become proud and self-righteous because they do the things that outwardly make you look godly. They go to church regularly, they get on the church committees, they get involved in church programs, they give to the church, and because they do all those things, they think that they're all right. They think that they are pleasing to God, and so they feel pretty good about themselves, and look down on others who do not live the way they do.

What was forgotten by the Jews and is forgotten by so many people, even Christians, is that we're sinners! Where is the attitude of continual humble repentance? Everyone agrees that the hardest thing for an unbeliever to do is to admit that they are a sinner. Well, it's the same for many believers as well! Once we're saved, once we plug into that religious "system", we think we've got it made and that we are righteous by our own acts. NO! Our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). It is

Jesus and Jesus Christ alone who is our righteousness!

The hardest thing for a believer to do is admit that they still sin. We are saved by grace, and nothing can change that, yes, but we must never lose that constant attitude of humble repentance, that realization that we still make wrong choices at times. It may not be a visible sin. We may have a wrong attitude, or wrong thoughts against someone. This is why when we end the day or start the day with prayer to the Lord, the first thing we must do is confess our sins. Humble yourself and search your heart for how you may have failed Him. Ask the Lord to show you how you may have fallen short. This restores our fellowship with God and keeps us from becoming proud and self-righteous.

Acts 22:25-28 But when they had tied him up with the straps, Paul asked the centurion who was standing there, "Is it legal for you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn't been condemned?" (26) When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you doing? This man is a Roman citizen!" (27) So the tribune went and asked Paul, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes," he said. (28) Then the tribune replied, "I paid a lot of money for this citizenship of mine." Paul said, "But I was born a citizen."

They were just about to start the lashings when Paul divulged that he was a Roman citizen. Being a citizen was a very big deal, and that brought things to a screeching halt. It protected Paul from being tortured, and it guaranteed that he would have to be given a fair trial. He could not be condemned for anything without due process.

Sometimes Roman citizenship was purchased through a bribe. That may have been the case here with the tribune. Paul's mention of being born a citizen tells us he inherited his Roman citizenship from his family. And that got the Romans' attention:

Acts 22:29-30 Immediately those who were about to examine him stepped back, and the tribune was afraid when he found out that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had tied him up. (30) The next day, since the Tribune wanted to find out exactly what Paul was being accused of by the Jews, he released him and ordered the high priests and the entire Council to meet. Then he brought Paul down and had him stand before them.

They immediately stopped the preparation of the lashing and untied him. Since Paul was a citizen, there would have to be a trial to resolve the issue. You would think that it would have been cleared up quickly, but the legal process that starts right here will take four years of Paul's life, the rest of the book of Acts, and will be still unresolved by the end of the book.

Chapter 23

Acts 23:1-2 Paul looked straight at the Council and said, "Brothers, with a clear conscience I have done my duty before God up to this very day." (2) Then the high priest Ananias ordered the men standing near him to strike him on the mouth.

This is not the Ananias who helped Paul after his conversion, but the Ananias who was the high priest at that time. This Ananias was also not the same high priest as at the time of Christ, thirty years before. Ananias' response agrees with what is known about him from Josephus, who described him as insolent, hot-tempered, profane, and greedy. Nice traits in a high priest, don't you think?

Acts 23:3-5 At this Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! How can you sit there and judge me according to the law and yet in violation of the law order me to be struck?" (4) The men standing near him asked, "Do you mean to insult God's high priest?" (5) Paul answered, "I didn't realize, brothers, that he is the high priest. After all, it is written, 'You must not speak evil about a ruler of your people.'"

"whitewashed wall" was a Jewish idiom for hypocrisy. Just like a wall is nicely painted on the outside but is something different on the inside, this person was not what he appeared or pretended to be. Paul was calling him "two-faced". Punishment before the trial was completed was against the Law.

History tells us that Ananias regularly stole temple sacrifices for his own use. Even after he was deposed from his office of high priest, he continually bribed his successor and the Roman procurator to maintain his power. In the revolt against Rome in A.D. 66, Ananias was hunted down by Jewish zealots, and his mansion was burned down. He was found cowering in an aqueduct, dragged from his hiding place and executed.

Exodus 22:28 prohibits cursing a ruler of the people. Paul must not have recognized this high priest, and he backed off. It could be that Paul's eyesight was poor, and he could not see Ananias clearly. Ananias also may not have been wearing his priestly robes, and Paul had not seen anyone in the Sanhedrin for many years.

Acts 23:6-8 When Paul saw that some of them were Sadducees and others were Pharisees, he shouted in the Council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee and a descendant of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope that the dead will be resurrected." (7) After he said that, an angry quarrel broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided, (8) because the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection and that there is no such thing as an angel or spirit, but the Pharisees believe in all those things.

Paul was no idiot. He knew he wasn't going to get a fair hearing from these guys, and, being led by the Holy Spirit, he knew exactly what to say. He went straight to the heart of the Christian faith, resurrection. Paul knew that there was dissension between these two groups over this issue, and he said exactly the right thing to start a fight and take the focus off of himself.

Bringing it into something we understand today, the Pharisees were the conservatives, and the Sadducees were the liberals. Both groups were wrong in some things, just like today's political factions. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection, and the Sadducees didn't, and Paul's statement went off like a bomb among the council.

Acts 23:9-11 There was a great deal of shouting until some of the scribes who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and argued forcefully, "We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" (10) The quarrel was becoming violent, and the tribune was afraid that they would tear Paul to pieces. So he ordered the soldiers to go down, take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks. (11) That night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Have courage! For just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, you must testify in Rome, too."

This tells us that this meeting was probably in the Antonio fortress, not the temple, because you can see that the Roman soldiers are still in charge of Paul. They see that the arguments between the

factions in the Sanhedrin are getting violent, and they get Paul out of there. Warned by friends not to go to Jerusalem, Paul may have begun to doubt his decision. But Jesus comes to him that night and comforts him that He is in control of what's happening.

Acts 23:12-15 In the morning, the Jews formed a conspiracy and took an oath not to eat or drink anything before they had killed Paul. (13) More than 40 men formed this conspiracy. (14) They went to the high priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to taste any food before we have killed Paul. (15) Now then, you and the Council must notify the tribune to bring him down to you on the pretext that you want to look into his case more carefully, but before he arrives we'll be ready to kill him."

The high priest and the Sanhedrin become accomplices to attempted murder, which shows the hatred they had for the gospel and the lengths they would go to protect their interests.

These conspirators took an oath to not eat or drink anything before they killed Paul. Well, I wonder if they carried out that oath, because they certainly did not kill Paul. Hopefully they starved themselves, because that's what these evil men deserved. But it's more likely that they were released from their vow, because Rabbinic law provided ways out of situations like this.

Acts 23:16-18 But the son of Paul's sister heard about the ambush, so he came and got into the barracks and told Paul. (17) Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, because he has something to tell him." (18) So the centurion took him, brought him to the tribune, and said, "The prisoner Paul called me and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to tell you."

We've mentioned before that Paul had a sister that lived in Jerusalem, and here we see that he had a nephew as well, and that nephew found out about this plot and came to inform Paul and the Roman soldiers. We're not told if Paul's nephew was a Christian, or how he got this information.

Acts 23:19-21 The tribune took him by the hand, stepped aside to be alone with him, and asked, "What have you got to tell me?" (20) He answered, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the Council tomorrow as though they were going to examine his case more carefully. (21) Don't believe them, because more than 40 of them are planning to ambush him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink before they have killed him. They are ready now, just waiting for your consent."

The plot is exposed, and the tribune immediately takes action:

Acts 23:22-24 The tribune dismissed the young man and ordered him not to tell anyone that he had notified him. (23) Then he summoned two centurions and ordered, "Get 200 soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o'clock tonight, along with 70 mounted soldiers and 200 soldiers with spears. (24) Provide a mount for Paul to ride, and take him safely to Governor Felix."

The tribune was sending almost a full cohort, and they would leave at night. Was he doing this out of sympathy for Paul? No, he was doing it because Paul was a Roman citizen and he would be responsible if he did not protect him. He was taking no chances. And they were all riding horses, so they would be moving as quickly as possible.

Felix the governor was Antonius Felix, a freedman of Antonia, mother of the Emperor Claudius. He was the brother of Pallas and became procurator of Palestine in A.D. 52/53. His administration was notorious for its corruption, cynicism, and cruelty. According to the historian Tacitus, Felix "reveled in cruelty and lust, and wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave." Felix was killed in the eruption of Vesuvius over Pompeii in A.D. 79.

Acts 23:25-30 He wrote a letter with this message: (26) "From: Claudius Lysias To: Governor Felix Greetings, Your Excellency: (27) This man had been seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I went with the guard and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. (28) I wanted to know the exact charge they were making against him, so I had him brought before their Council. (29) I found that, although he was charged with questions about their law, there was no charge against him deserving death or imprisonment. (30) Since a plot against the man has been reported to me, I am at once sending him to you and have also ordered his accusers to present their charges against him before you."

This is interesting, because it shows us the Roman view of what was happening. They saw it as a religious matter, not a civil dispute, so they did not see that Paul deserved punishment. Of course, the tribune left out the part about him almost beating a Roman citizen. By the way, Felix held the same position that Pontius Pilate used to have.

Acts 23:31-35 So the soldiers, in keeping with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. (32) The next day they let the horsemen ride with Paul while they returned to their barracks. (33) When these men came to Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. (34) After reading the letter, the governor asked which province Paul was from. On learning that he was from Cilicia, (35) he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers arrive." Then he ordered Paul to be kept in custody in Herod's palace.

Antipatris was a city in Judea about 35 miles northwest of Jerusalem (about halfway to Caesarea). Governor Felix asked what province he was from to determine whether he had legal jurisdiction over Paul. He could have sent him to his home province, Cilicia (where Tarsus was located), for trial, but decided to hear the case himself. Herod's palace was also there in Caesarea.

Artist's drawing of Caesarea in Paul's day, with Herod's palace on the left, extending into the harbor.





Palace ruins today

Josephus called this a "most magnificent palace" that Herod the Great built on a promontory jutting out into the waters of Caesarea. The pool in the center was nearly Olympic in size, and was filled with fresh water. A statue once stood in the center. Paul was imprisoned on the grounds of this palace (Acts 23:35).

Ruins of the harbor / palace area. The water would have been over the green grass area in Paul's day.



Chapter 24

Acts 24:1-3 Five days later, the high priest Ananias arrived with certain elders and Tertullius, an attorney, and they summarized their case against Paul before the governor. (2) When Paul had been summoned, Tertullius opened the prosecution by saying: "Your Excellency Felix, since we are enjoying lasting peace because of you, and since reforms for this nation are being brought about through your foresight, (3) we always and everywhere acknowledge it with profound gratitude.

The lawyer buttered up the governor first by fawning all over him, even though history shows that he was the opposite of what Tertullius was saying – inept, corrupt, and cruel.

Acts 24:4-6 But so as not to detain you any further, I beg you to hear us briefly with your customary graciousness. (5) For we have found this man a perfect pest and an agitator among all Jews throughout the world. He is a ringleader in the sect of the Nazarenes (6) and even tried to profane the temple, but we arrested him.

Verse 6 was definitely a lie, but the attorney was smart to call him an “agitator among all Jews”. Felix would take this charge seriously, but would care less about the charge of profaning the temple.

This is the only place in the Bible where Christians are called Nazarenes, meant as an insult, as the saying in Israel went : “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46).

Acts 24:7-9 But Tribune Lysias came along and took him out of our hands with much force, (24:8) ordering his accusers to come before you. (8) By examining him for yourself, you will be able to find out from him everything of which we accuse him." (9) The Jews supported his accusations by asserting that these things were true.

Oh, this is rich. He is accusing the Roman tribune of preventing the Jews from carrying out justice in this case. And, like in the trials of Jesus, the Sanhedrin brought along some false witnesses to testify for them.

Acts 24:10-13 When the governor motioned for Paul to speak, he replied: "Since I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years, I am pleased to present my defense. (11) You can verify for yourself that I went up to worship in Jerusalem no more than twelve days ago. (12) They never found me debating with anyone in the temple or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or throughout the city, (13) and they cannot prove to you the charges they are now bringing against me.

Paul also compliments the governor, implying that he would be fair in his judgment. He gives an intelligent defense, pointing out that he was there in Jerusalem to worship, not to stir up unrest, and in fact he wouldn't have had time to do so, only being there a short time. He denied that he was stirring up the crowd and pointed out that his accusers could not prove their charges.

This is similar to today's controversies between creationists and evolutionists, and Christians and anti-Christians in general. The facts always support the Biblical creationist Christian worldview, but our opponents always seem to have the financial and political advantage.

Acts 24:14-16 However, I admit to you that in accordance with the Way, which they call a heresy, I worship the God of our ancestors and believe in everything written in the Law and the Prophets. (15) I have the same hope in God that they themselves cherish — that there is to be a resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. (16) Therefore, I always do my best to have a clear conscience before God and people.

Paul points out that he believes in the same God and in the same revelation from God. Paul argues that this was a religious dispute rather than a political one, so that the Roman authorities didn't need to worry about it.

Acts 24:17-21 After many years I have come back to my people to bring gifts for the poor and to offer sacrifices. (18) They found me in the temple doing these things just as I had completed the purification ceremony. No crowd or noisy mob was present. (19) But

some Jews from Asia were there, and they should be here before you to accuse me if they have anything against me. (20) Otherwise, these men themselves should tell what wrong they found when I stood before the Council — (21) unless it is for the one thing I shouted as I stood among them: 'It is for the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'"

Verse 17 confirms that this was one reason he came back to Jerusalem, to bring gifts from the other churches to the needy people in the Jerusalem church. Paul is telling the whole truth – this is exactly what happened. He points out that his original accusers weren't even there, and that he was being unjustly attacked because of his religious belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Acts 24:22-23 Felix was rather well informed about the Way, and so he adjourned the trial with the comment, "When Tribune Lysias arrives, I will decide your case." (23) He ordered the centurion to guard Paul but to let him have some freedom and not to keep any of his friends from caring for his needs.

Felix apparently knew more about the Christian movement than what the Jewish leaders had told him. It looks like he was already convinced that this was just a religious issue, and so he allowed Paul some freedom.

Acts 24:24-26 Some days later, Felix arrived with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him talk about faith in Jesus the Messiah. (25) As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became afraid and said, "For the present you may go. When I get a chance, I will send for you again." (26) At the same time he was hoping to receive a bribe from Paul, and so he would send for him frequently to talk with him.

Felix's wife was Jewish! It's possible that she was the source of his knowledge about this new Christian sect. Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa 1 and sister of Agrippa II. She would have been about 20 years old at the time. She had married the king of a small region in Syria but divorced him when she was 16 to marry Felix. This was Felix's third marriage.

Considering his history, the topic of self-control may have hit home with Felix, and caused him some fear of judgment. Bribing an official for your release was a fairly common thing then in the Roman Empire, and that's what Felix was hoping Paul would do. He could have simply dismissed the case and set Paul free, but he was too concerned about pleasing the Jews, and decided to just pass the buck. Being released was not in God's plan for Paul.

Acts 24:27 After two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. Since Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor, he left Paul in prison.

After two years (!), the issue is still not resolved and Paul is still in prison, although, as a Roman citizen, we can assume he was being treated pretty well and allowed to have visitors. Felix was keeping Paul in prison to gain favor with the Jews. Romans were notoriously politically motivated. Finally Felix was recalled to Rome, apparently because he had been unnecessarily cruel in quashing a rebellion of Jews in Caesarea.

Porcius Festus was the procurator of Palestine who succeeded Felix; and we don't know for sure the beginning or the end of his rule (at his death), although he appears to have died in office after about

two years. Nero recalled Felix in A.D. 57 or 58, and Festus was appointed to his vacant office in A.D. somewhere between 57 and 59. According to Josephus, his administration was better than that of Felix or his successor Albinus, but Luke in Acts portrays him in a less favorable way. He was willing to sacrifice Paul to gain Jewish favor by taking him to Jerusalem for trial (Acts 25:9), regardless of Paul's guilt or innocence.

The time that Paul was in prison may have been the time that Luke took to conduct interviews and do the research to write his gospel and part of the book of Acts.