

On To Rome (Acts 24)

Paul has arrived in Caesarea to stand before the Roman governor Felix, to face charges brought against him by the Jewish religious leaders. We read about this trial in chapter 24. In chapter 25 he has another trial before Felix's successor, Festus. And in chapter 26 Paul once again defends himself before King Agrippa.

Three Questions:

1. Why is Paul on Trial?

A. Paul has been under guard at the governor's palace in Caesarea for 5 days when his accusers get to town. (24:1)

We don't know much about Tertullus, but his name is Greek. The Jewish religious leaders have hired a Gentile lawyer to represent them in this Gentile court. (24:2-6)

B. Tertullus makes three charges.

1) Paul has stirred up riots among the Jews anywhere he has gone in the world. 2) Paul is the ringleader of a sect (insinuating a heretical sect) of Judaism. 3) Paul tried to profane the temple by bringing a Gentile into it. (21:8).

2. What is Paul's defense?

A. 1) Paul never sought to cause trouble—in Jerusalem or any of the synagogues he visited in the Gentile world (24:11-12); 2) he admits that he belongs to those who follow the "Way" (24:14-15); and 3) he says the followers of the Way worship the same God and believe the same Scriptures that those who are accusing him do.

In addition, those who follow the Way also share the same hope that those who are accusing them do. They are looking expectantly for God to bring about the same thing the Pharisees say they look forward to—the resurrection of the dead.

B. When the apostles speak about "the resurrection of the dead."

The phrase speaks to the bodily resurrection, the end of evil, and the new creation. What no one expected was that there would first be the coming of the Messiah, when these realities would begin, and then the second coming.

Paul knows that the last days began with the resurrection of Jesus and that the next big event on the calendar of redemptive history will be the return of Jesus as Judge. When that day comes, all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Live in anticipation of that day. (24:16)

2 Corinthians 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad."

3. God has established the governing authorities. (Romans 13:1-5)

A. To rebel against authority is to rebel against God.

We are to follow the law unless a law is contrary to the law of God. Paul is saying his conscience is clear in regard to obeying Rome's laws about peace and order. He has not broken the law of Rome. He contends that the gospel both supports the rule of Caesar (Acts 25:8-12) and fulfills the hope of Israel (26:6-7). Paul is a loyal citizen of Rome and a loyal son of Israel. His conscience toward God and man—human authority placed over him by God — is clear.

B. Paul had been arrested numerous times in Asia Minor and Macedonia. It wasn't because he had been disrespectful of authority or of local laws. He showed respect for authority and was often arrested on false charges or based on false testimony. This is not to say there was never a time the apostles disobeyed human authority. When the authorities demanded something that clearly went against what God had commanded, Peter and Paul and the other disciples determined that they had to disobey.

For example, after being told by an angel of the Lord, "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple area the whole message of this Life" (Acts 5:20), they did. "But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

4. Profaning the temple.

A. Paul describes exactly what happened. (24:17-18)
Paul had come with a gift for the Jews who were facing famine. He had gone to the temple to present offerings and was in a state of ceremonial purity. He had not brought a Gentile into the temple; he was there with several Jewish men who had made a Nazarite vow. He had done nothing to profane the temple or create a disruption. He easily refuted the three charges against him. But then he said something else. He presented the real reason he was on trial (24:21)

B. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead.
What is their problem? It's that pesky, persistent belief Paul has, that the resurrection of the dead has already begun with the resurrection of Jesus as the first of all who will one day be raised.

The Pharisees don't believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, and they certainly don't think being connected to Jesus is required to have the hope of one day being raised. Evidently, Felix is familiar enough with both Jewish and Christian beliefs to recognize that Paul has a point.

It is religious differences that have brought this conflict. He knows that religious differences are of no concern to Rome. But he also wants to gain some favor with the Jewish religious leaders who have a lot of influence in the territory under his jurisdiction. His strategy is delay. He will delay at least until Lysias, the Roman Tribune who sent Paul to him, can make the trip to Caesarea to put in his two cents.

Meanwhile, Felix and his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish, had Paul around to the house for some conversation about Jesus. And they have three topics of conversation. (24:25)

C. It's interesting to think about what they might have discussed!
Maybe Paul talked about righteousness and self-control, two subjects he addressed in his already written letter to the church in Rome. Maybe he told them that there is not a single person who is righteous but there is a righteousness available through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. Felix likely would not have appreciated this message. He had a history of notorious cruelty and had seduced Drusilla, who promptly divorced her husband to marry him, so perhaps the topic of self-control was not appealing to them either. Perhaps his talk about a coming day when they would stand before God and give an account for their lives was not something Felix and Drusilla wanted to think about. And as far as we know Lysias, the Roman tribune, never showed up. So Paul sat in custody in Caesarea for two years, and then Felix left office and was replaced by Festus.