

**Text: Ac 24.1-9**

Most of Acts 24 involves Luke's report of Paul's trial before Felix, the Roman governor. No doubt it is a summary of what happened, but the speeches and formats follow a typical Roman trial of the period.

Today we will go through the portion of the trial that contains the charges against Paul. One commentator says that it follows the rhetorical pattern of the day. Tertullus, the "lawyer" is a "*rhetor*" (Gk) — someone skilled in speaking techniques, hired to persuade a judge about a case. Was he Jew or Gentile? The text isn't clear, the name is Gentile, but many Hellenized Jews had Gentile names.

There are many points in the speech of Tertullus to take offense at. There is his obvious flattery of Felix, trying to win his favor. Then there are the charges against Paul, some with a bare grain of truth, but all full of exaggeration and spin, making them false.

**Read Acts 24.1-9**

When we come to a text like this, I again want to move over it quickly, and I wonder what use we can make of it for our instruction. I don't want to simply ignore it, since Luke gives eight or nine verses of attention to it.

Of course, we find nothing in the speech to imitate! So, how should we think about this?

I've given our message this title:

***Be Sure They Can Only Charge You Falsely***

The undercurrent of persecution for the faith will form a sub-theme in many of our messages through the rest of Acts.

In our passage, we find Paul's Jewish enemies doing their best to make their charges stick. Their weakness is they have nothing substantive to latch hold of.

Throughout Acts, the enemies of the church periodically made attempts to attack the church in the official Roman courts. Every time, the courts refused the trumped-up charges. The outcome this time would be no different, and Paul's testimony had a lot to do with it.

**Proposition:** There are many adversaries, be sure they have no just cause to lay a charge against you.

## I. Surveying the rhetoric

### A. The charging party (1)

1. Ananias himself, the chief priest, makes a point to join the charging party
2. With Ananias and the elders is Tertullus, “an attorney”
  - a. Gk: *rhetor*

“‘Attorney’ is the translation of a Greek word that appears only here in the New Testament (*rhetoros*), which means a lawyer who was specially skillful in oratory.”<sup>1</sup>

- b. Hired to sway the judge, mostly with rhetorical skill (no evidence = shout louder)

### B. The flattering *exordium* (or *capitatio benevolentiae*) (2-4)

1. The first part of the lawyer’s task is to gain the favor of the judge (the governor)
2. He makes three flattering assertions (though probably summarized for us)
  - a. Felix, the peace-maker (“Since we have through you attained much peace” 2b)
    - 1) Felix was notoriously corrupt (as we shall see later)
    - 2) Felix’s mode of keeping peace was brutal suppression of the people
    - 3) But in the meantime, he was quite willing to profit from those who broke the peace

“Tacitus (*Ann.* XII. 54) declares that Felix secretly encouraged banditti and shared the plunder for which the Jews finally made complaint to Nero who recalled him.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 24.1.

<sup>2</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 24.2.

Peacemaker? Would the average citizen think so? The kind of peace Felix promoted was what Tacitus put in the mouth of Calgacus, a Gaelic chieftain who fought Agricola in Scotland: “Calgacus: ‘they make a desert and call it peace.’”<sup>3</sup>

b. Felix, the far-sighted reformer (“since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation” 2c)

- 1) There were no reforms in Palestine brought in by Felix
- 2) His administration was so brutal that it gave rise to many rebellious factions who terrorized the area
- 3) He had no sympathy or understanding of the locals

c. Felix, the noble benefactor (“most excellent Felix” 3)

- 1) This title really belonged to people of higher birth than Felix (remember he was a freed slave)
- 2) This rhetoric had one purpose: win the favour of the judge

“Rhetoric manuals emphasized winning the judge’s favor, and speeches before public officials always opened by praising them.”<sup>4</sup>

d. Tertullus concludes with a promise to be brief (so in kindness indulge us) (4)

C. The empty *narratio* [formal charge] (5-8)

1. Paul, the pestilential revolutionary (5a)

a. The label “real pest” is not mere name-calling

- 1) Literal meaning: a bearer of plague, a pestilential person
- 2) This makes Paul out as contagious

<sup>3</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 439.

<sup>4</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ac 24.2-3.

- b. The contagion Paul carries is a kind of anarchism (“stirs up dissension”)
- 1) The idea is that Paul habitually fomented public disorder
  - 2) Compare charges against Paul elsewhere
    - a) Thessalonica (Ac 17.6-7)

Ac 17.6-7 When they did not find them, they *begon* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also;<sup>7</sup> and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”

- b) The Asian Jews in the temple (Ac 21.28)

Ac 21.28 crying out, “Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”

- c. The element of truth in the charge: many disturbances did rise about Paul as he carried out his ministry

“it was also undeniable that Paul’s presence in a city had been accompanied time after time by disturbances within the Jewish communities. It had been so in the cities of South Galatia, in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus.”<sup>5</sup>

- d. The fact of the matter: these disturbances came at the instigation of the Jews

## 2. Paul, the Nazarene heretic (5b)

- a. The word “sect” is *haireseos*, “division”

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 440.

- b. The word only occurs here, used in derision, perhaps building on the insignificance of Nazareth
  - c. The charge implied that Paul led a break-away religion, not approved by Rome
  - d. (The charge failed because Felix, despite his faults, had good knowledge about ‘the Way’) (see v. 22)
3. Paul, the desecrator of the temple (6-8)
- a. The Romans gave the Jews authority over the temple and its precincts
    - 1) The charge implies that Paul himself had done something to defile the temple
    - 2) The original charge in Ac 21 was that Paul brought a Gentile into the Jewish area of the temple
    - 3) No witnesses could prove the original charge, so the charge is more general (and not any more true)
  - b. Tertullus paints a picture of the Jews minding their own business, but Lysias interfered
    - 1) The last part of v. 6, all of v. 7, and first bit of v. 8 are not included in some mss
      - a) Interestingly, the NAU includes it (with footnote), but the NIV and the ESV do not
      - b) One prominent textual scholar, Bruce Metzger, argues for it nonetheless
      - c) In v. 8, Tertullus calls for Felix to “examine him yourself”
      - d) The question is, who should he examine? Lysias, or Paul?
        - i) Note v. 22 mentioned earlier

Ac 24.22 ¶ But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.”

- ii) Why would he wait to examine Lysias to make a decision? Lysias was an objective witness to some of the goings on in Jerusalem

“The tone of the Western addition is so thoroughly in accord with the rest of Tertullus’s speech that one is inclined to accept it as genuine.”<sup>6</sup>

- 2) The Jews complain about jurisdiction here: they insist they should try Paul, not the Romans

#### D. The concluding *peroratio*, the summation (8)

1. The appeal to Lysias’ testimony relies on one thing
  - a. They are aware of Lysias’ ambition
  - b. They count on Lysias to answer politically, to deflect blame
  - c. They hope to corroborate their version of the story by putting Lysias in a spot
2. They have no witnesses, but they hope Paul or Lysias will prove their case

## II. Remember our instructions

- A. The charges against Paul were serious, but false
  1. Every charge, if proved, could bring about Paul’s death
  2. Nonetheless, Paul was no trouble-maker, he was the victim of violent reactionaries
- B. Likewise, the New Testament instructs us to conduct ourselves honestly and faithfully in the world

Rm 13.1 ¶ Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Rm 13.5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, 441–42.

1 Pt 2.13 ¶ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,

Tit 3.1-2 ¶ Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,<sup>2</sup> to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

2 Tim 2.24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** There are many adversaries, be sure they have no just cause to lay a charge against you.

If all they can charge you with are lies, you are free indeed. Your conscience is clear, you can testify with boldness.