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THE APOSTLE PAUL ON TRIAL

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 118
ACTS 24:1-9

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ACTS 24:1-9 "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."

In order to understand this chapter we must have some historical background. In this passage we find Paul about to launch into a career of witnessing to the VIPs of the Roman Empire. In the next two chapters Paul will witness to three of the most important people of his day.

1. Felix---the present governor of the province of Judaea.
2. Festus---the governor that succeeded him.
3. Agrippa---this is Herod Agrippa II. He was from one of the most famous families of the ancient world.

During the next two years in prison in Caesarea Paul appeared before three judges-- but they, not Paul, will be on trial. In all instances Paul presented the clear facts of the gospel. "Believe and be saved" was his message. The issue in all the trials was the person of Jesus Christ, and what will happen to these three judges in eternity.

So Paul brought the issue of salvation right into the center of the Roman Empire. Paul made it quite clear that every member of the human race was born with an old sin nature, and that each person must believe for himself, be saved for himself.

Paul might well be called the super-apostle, for he understood these things better than anyone else in the world. Even Peter recommended Paul's epistles when in 2 Peter, Chapter 3 he suggested that this was the best way to really understand doctrine.

At the time of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea tremendous political changes were going on inside the Roman Empire. Claudius was emperor of Rome at the time. He started out as a successful leader but became reckless and lost the trust and respect of the Roman Senate. He only trusted certain slaves and he exalted these to places of leadership. One was Narcissus, the next was Pallus, and the third was Felix. These three former slaves were running the empire under the permission of Claudius. Pallus and Felix were brothers. Pallus was the lover of one of the wives of Claudius. One of the wives of Claudius had a son by another marriage and his name was Nero. When Claudius was poisoned Nero became the emperor. Pallus and Felix were on the "in group," but Felix began to steal so much from the empire that they sent him off to be the Procurator of Judaea. Felix realized that there was lots of wealth in Judaea, so he took the assignment and that is why he was in Caesarea right at the time when Paul arrived there.

ACTS 24:1 "And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul." It says "After five days." So one day the members of the Sanhedrin woke up and realized that Paul had left town. The assassination plot of the forty young men had been thwarted. Paul was safe, sixty miles away in Caesarea. This turn of events frustrated all they had planned to do. There was no way now they could assassinate him. The Sanhedrin probably took a whole day passing some kind of an ordinance to relieve the forty young men of their assassination plot and their hunger vow. But they didn't give up. They were going to get at Paul some way, and to do so they would have to have a lawyer. It was the custom for non-Romans to hire an attorney to represent them. Tertullus was such an attorney, so the Sanhedrin hired him to represent them in this case. In that time a young man could study Roman law and then go out into the empire and represent Rome for non-Roman patrons and thereby make a fortune. Tertullus was one of these lawyers who had set up his law office in Jerusalem and the Sanhedrin hired him. In the Sanhedrin there had been a big dispute over the resurrection and it all ended up by them hiring Tertullus to go with them to Caesarea to accuse Paul. All this was accomplished in five days. The Sanhedrin was zealous and they really had to speed things up in order to get all this done in five days and get down to Caesarea in time for the trial of Paul. Ananias was the High Priest. He had been exposed to Roman law before. He had gotten in trouble with the Sanhedrin and he went before Claudius for trial. The emperor decided in favor of Ananias, so Ananias had developed real affection for the Roman system. He naturally concluded that he would win this suit against Paul just as he had won against the Samaritans some time earlier. Ananias had bitter hatred for Paul. He was now quite old and in a very few years later he would be assassinated by an anti-Roman organization. Tertullus was a Roman lawyer, an orator. Probably he was a Greek, though a Roman citizen. Using this gifted man as their lawyer they brought the accusation against Paul and placed it before the Roman government in Caesarea.

At that time Rome had three types of provinces. The first, a senatorial province, and these were the first class provinces. Next was the province called the delegated provinces. The most inferior province was ruled by a Procurator, and this was the type of province we have before us here in Judaea. The emperor could appoint the Procurator without the consent of the Senate.

When Claudius first made Judaea a third class province he first appointed a man named Fadus to be procurator. Herod Agrippa had ruled there before and he had recommended to the Senate that they make Claudius the Emperor. Herod Agrippa had two daughters and we will meet both of them later on in this study. One was Drusilla and she was a very beautiful blonde. Drusilla was very ambitious and had been married to a king in an Arabian country. Along came Felix and he persuaded Drusilla to elope with him and accompany him to Caesarea. Later on we will meet the second daughter of Herod Agrippa and her name was Bernice. She was the most beautiful woman of the ancient world. She was a redhead. Many historians describe her and they say that she was much more beautiful than Cleopatra and much more dangerous. At that time Bernice was living in incest with her brother, her husband having died some time before. So Herod Agrippa II and Bernice, when in Caesarea sometime later, will get to hear Paul's witness. So there you have it--Felix, Festus, Drusilla, Herod Agrippa II and Bernice will all hear witness for Christ from Paul. Some years later when Vespasian came along and directed the siege of Jerusalem in 67 A.D., Bernice went over to the Roman side and became the mistress of Vespasian. When in 70 A.D. Vespasian left Jerusalem to go to Rome to become the emperor, he left his son Titus behind in charge of Jerusalem and Bernice became the mistress of Titus, even though he was ten years younger than she. Later he wanted to marry her but the Roman Senate said "No." They said, "We had so much trouble with a woman named Cleopatra and we are not going to take on a woman like Bernice." At that time Bernice was fifty years old and still the most beautiful woman in the Roman Empire.

Meet Felix. He was the favorite of Claudius. Pallus and Narcissus told Claudius that Felix was a fine man with dynamic leadership and would make a great governor for Judaea. With this Claudius agreed. The truth was that Felix was a super-thief. Ananias was appointed High Priest by Rome and he was a super-gangster and he could always throw enough money Rome's way in order to make it interesting. Felix went to a party and saw Drusilla and persuaded her to leave her husband and come with him. Even the common citizens who were not Christians at all were shocked by all of this. So this is the background for these chapters in Acts. So Ananias, certain Sadducees and Tertullus came down to accuse Paul. Now since this is such an important section of Acts, I want to put down point by point the things we have just outlined.

1. When Felix first came to power in Judaea he met at a party the beautiful and charming Drusilla, granddaughter of Herod the Great. He persuaded her to marry him. This shocked the Arabs and offended the Jews.
2. In Acts 24-26 we will also meet the beautiful and jealous sister of Drusilla, and her name was Bernice. Both of these wicked women will be exposed to the Gospel.
3. Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, was one of the greatest men of the ancient world.
4. Drusilla was the wife of the King of Amesa, a large Arab kingdom. She left him in order to marry Felix. Felix persuaded her that one way or another he would one day rule Rome, and she bought his line. He didn't quite make it as you remember. She and her son by Felix died in 79 A.D. in the eruption of Vesuvius in Pompeii.
5. Herod Agrippa, II was responsible for Claudius becoming Emperor of Rome.
6. Drusilla, the beautiful blonde, and Bernice, the beautiful redhead, also heard the Gospel.

Claudius had just made a great mistake by assassinating his wife and by marrying another woman and by adopting her son, Nero. Nero will become the next emperor, and not Felix. A few months after Nero was adopted Claudius was poisoned and Nero became the emperor. All of this will go on while Paul is in prison at Caesarea, so when Paul appealed to Caesar it meant that he would appear before Nero.

ACTS 24:2 "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," This is the first of three trials. In came Felix and beside him was the beautiful Drusilla. They all entered and the brilliant Tertullus began the case. Please notice that in the very first statement we know that Tertullus had a very weak case, for he began by some cheap flattery for Felix. He said, "Seeing by thee we enjoy great quietness." "Tugchano" here translated "enjoy really means "obtain" so it should read, "Because of you we have obtained great quietness." Tertullus is preparing the way to accuse Paul for breaking this tranquility. So Tertullus must flatter Felix, but Felix is not going to buy his argument. Felix had gotten the idea that Paul was a wealthy Jew and he hoped to get some money from him. Felix will wait for his bribe for more than a year, a bribe that never was forthcoming.

Notice that Tertullus made three accusations against Paul.

1. Disturbing the peace in Jerusalem was his first accusation.
2. He will accuse Paul of being a leader of a faction of the Jews, a leader of a subversive organization.
3. He will accuse Paul of profaning the Temple and this was against both Rome and the Jews. This carried a death penalty.

So Tertullus started his case with a neat little bit of flattery.

ACTS 24:3 "We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness." You can almost feel the sweetness drop out of the mouth of Tertullus. In fact, it was the worst bit of malarkey ever put forth in a court of law.

ACTS 24:4 "Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldst hear us of thy clemency a few words." Here we discover that Tertullus was a very clever lawyer. He reminded Felix that he could go on and on about his greatness.

ACTS 24:5 "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" Here is the first charge. Paul is accused of being a plague. A mover of seditions meant that he caused the riot in Jerusalem. This was a violation of Roman law and if Paul was proven guilty he would be slain. He even accused Paul of leading a world-wide revolt against the Jews. He also accused him of being a leader of the Nazarenes. Felix had never heard of the Nazarenes but it sounded seditious. All this was done to make Paul look like a riot leader.

ACTS 24:6 "Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law." Here is the third accusation and it should end with the phrase "whom we took" for the next phrase is not in the original text. The next phrases are not found in the original text. In that day the temple served as the bank and this means that Paul had found out where the treasures were kept, and he went in and tried to get away with a large treasure. Of course, none of this was true, but it made a great case before Felix. This would get the attention of Felix, for if any stealing went on he was the one who was going to do it. So Tertullus knew how to get the attention of Felix.

In our next study we will hear the defense of Paul, and it will not be the kind of defense you would expect. He will make a brilliant statement of the saving gospel and Felix will have to face "What think ye of Christ?" So the issue before Felix will be "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" But Felix was too wicked and too involved in sin to ever take the gospel seriously. We will see his interesting defense next time.