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PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE FELIX
(When Felix had a tiger by the tail)

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 119
ACTS 24:9-10

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ACTS 24:9-10 "And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so. Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:"

We saw last time that verses 7 and 8 are not in the original Greek. As we get down to the end of the Book of Acts we must keep in mind that we are in the declining years of the Roman Empire. Capitalism had made things great for the Roman Empire but they had drifted into socialism. They began to feed the poor with grain from Egypt and the empire became an empire of beggars. The barbarians began to take over the empire and slavery brought corruption and by the time Claudius ended his reign and Nero took over, things were in a bad decline. The one thing that saved the Roman Empire at that time was the rise of Christianity and within Christianity was the rise of Bible doctrine. This is the factor that prolonged the Roman Empire for several centuries. Later on Christianity deteriorated into religion and religion was the greatest factor in the decline and destruction of the Roman Empire. In many ways the United States is facing the same problems Rome faced in Paul's day. So it is interesting that here in the closing chapters of Acts we see the clash of the Roman Empire and Christianity. The one answer to the problems of the Roman Empire was Christianity.

Let us recall the three charges made against Paul by Tertullus.

1. Disturbing the peace in Jerusalem. Of course, this was a great distortion of the facts.
2. Leading a revolt against the Roman Empire. Actually nothing was farther from the truth. The truth was this--the gospel Paul preached brought the golden age of the empire and actually saved the empire for several centuries. Paul literally changed the course of world history by introducing Christianity and Bible doctrine into the empire.
3. Attempting to profane the holy temple in Jerusalem.

Drusilla and Felix were in the castle at Caesarea enjoying the life of the Mediterranean coast and one day a group of soldiers arrived in Caesarea with a prisoner by the name of Paul. This one event changed everything. Tertullus, the Roman orator, used every trick in the book to remove Paul from the scene. But remember this: Paul was in the hands of God and Paul's greatest ministry was ahead of him. Now, to be sure, Paul had made a mistake by going to Jerusalem. But after all, who does not fail somewhere along the way? Paul had rebounded and his great world-wide ministry was just ahead for him and before he died he would be able to say that "Some in Caesar's household salute thee." Paul's legalistic vow in the Jerusalem temple brought some severe punishment, but God turned the cursing into blessing and Paul was thrown into the Roman arena to defend Christianity before the leaders of the empire. Now any of the three charges made against Paul could cause him to be beheaded if they could be proved true. Tertullus was indeed clever and he tried his best to pin these charges on Paul. Indeed Tertullus did build a very appealing case against Paul, but through it all God cared for Paul and in every situation Paul was the master of the situation. Since verse

seven and part of eight are not in the original, the text should read "Whom we seized, whom you may be able after examining yourself to be able to see why we accuse him." So in these words Tertullus threw the case of Paul into the hands of Felix. But please notice here a very important point. Tertullus had made three severe accusations without presenting any evidence to back up his statements. Roman law said that a man could not be proven guilty without proper evidence and that evidence must follow certain established principles. None of those points of Roman law were observed in Paul's trial.

ACTS 24:9 "And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so." This verse is given simply to show that the Jews were spineless and were willing to lie and distort the issue only if they could carry their point and put an end to Paul. The word for "saying" here is "Phasko." Socrates used this same word and it means "to alledge" something. In other words, they alledged that Paul was guilty but they had no facts to back up their stand.

ACTS 24:10 "Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:" Now how can Paul defend himself against such a magnificent presentation? Indeed Tertullus was a clever lawyer and he had gotten on the good side of Felix with his flattery and compliments. He had also insinuated that Paul had robbed the temple in Jerusalem and this was a good way to arouse the hatred of Felix, for if anybody robbed anything in Judaea, then Felix was the one who would do the robbing. Felix was greedy for money and he wanted to get money out of Paul one way or another. Neither does he want a revolt in Judaea, for this would cut down on taxes and Felix got his cut out of the taxes collected. So remember this point as we begin to look at the defense of Paul--Rome is going to give Paul a chance to defend himself. This shows again the great fairness of the Roman courts of that time. Paul was innocent until proven guilty, and though Tertullus had accused him of three very terrible crimes against Rome, he had given no evidence to back up his claims. So Paul was given an opportunity to answer his charges.

(I would like to inject something here that you must keep in mind if you are to understand the frame of mind of Paul as he came to his defense. Back in Jerusalem just a few nights before, when he had been dejected and discouraged, Jesus had appeared to him in a night vision and had given him assurance and had promised him that he would witness in Rome. This was all the evidence Paul needed. He believed in the word of Jesus and he knew that there was no way in the world for them to kill him there in Caesarea for the Lord had told him that he would witness in Rome. Paul had inner information and inner assurance and he wasn't the least bit afraid of Tertullus, or the high priest, or the Sadducees or Felix or anybody else. The great promises of God were running through his mind and Paul was as secure as if he had been sitting on the throne of the Roman Empire, with the emperor bowing at his feet. Now this is the frame of mind of Paul as he began his defense.)

The verse says here that Felix beckoned to Paul. Now let us see what that means. Roman officials were very proud, and they never gave concessions to anyone. The word is "nod" and it was ever so slight. Felix just gave a slight nod of his head and this was the signal for Paul to

speak. Paul will turn out to be the important one in the courtroom, for before it is over he will turn the Roman Empire upside down and change the course of all future centuries. If you think Tertullus was brilliant, it was nothing compared to the witness of Paul.

Paul began with the words "I know." He used the word "epi stamai" and it means to comprehend history and know the facts behind the facts. The only way to properly understand history is to understand Bible doctrine. Today you cannot really know the condition of the United States unless you know Bible doctrine. So Paul began here by showing that he understood the history of the Roman Empire. Paul called Felix a judge--the word is "krites" and means critic, an experienced critic concerning Roman law. Paul didn't say, "I do more cheerfully answer" but a better translation is, "I do now defend myself." So Paul actually said, "I am delighted that I can defend myself before someone who knows Roman law." In other words, Paul told Felix in a nice way that he was going to stick his nose into Roman law and keep it right there. In other words, Paul was saying this in substance--"I have heard this brazen liar Tertullus make these three accusations against me, but I am not the least bit disturbed, for I know the Roman law and I know exactly where I stand. This is one time, Felix, when you are going to be objective and I am going to stick to the facts."

Look At Seven Points On Paul's Approach

1. Paul appealed to the spirit of Roman law. He was appealing to an objective attitude on the part of Judge Felix--in other words a fair hearing.
2. Paul was experienced with Roman law and he was both impersonal and objective. Paul stuck with the facts. So actually Felix had a tiger by the tail, but he didn't know it yet.
3. Paul avoided flattery as was employed by Tertullus, but he did employ courtesy. Felix was a Roman official in high authority and Paul treated him with courtesy and respect.
4. Paul denied the charges and demanded proof of his guilt.
5. Paul distinguished between accusation and proof.
6. Paul will follow up the argument of Tertullus by presenting his side. He will separate the church from the state.
7. Paul made an indictment against Hebrew religion. He will show that Hebrew religion failed to move to a logical conclusion and thereby they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. This defense we are to study next time was the most brilliant of all time.