LESSON 24:
PAUL IN PRISON, PART 3 (ACTS 24:1-25:12)

After Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, the Roman commander was unable to fully establish the facts of the case. When the commander learned about a Jewish plot to kill Paul, he had Paul transported to Caesarea. He sent a letter to Governor Felix so he could handle the matter.

PAUL BEFORE GOVERNOR FELIX (ACTS 24:1-21)

24:1-4. Paul's accusers arrived in Caesarea (sent by the commander, Acts 23:30). This included Ananias (the high priest, Acts 23:2), some elders (members of the Sanhedrin), and a lawyer named Tertullus (who was skilled in speaking). After Paul was called in and the hearing began, Tertullus offered great flattery to Governor Felix. He spoke of how the Jewish nation enjoyed great peace and reforms because of Felix's foresight and actions. This was certainly not the typical Jewish view of Felix. Then, Tertullus proceeded to accuse Paul.

24:5-9. Tertullus made four accusations against Paul. First, that Paul was a pestilence/plague, thus being a dangerous person to society. Second, that Paul stirred up trouble among Jews throughout the Roman world, thus being someone who worked against the peace that the governor was tasked with keeping among Jews. Third, that Paul was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, thus painting both Paul and all followers of Jesus (from Nazareth) as dangerous. Fourth, that Paul tried to desecrate the temple, thus implying intent to profane the temple (Acts 21:27-29). Tertullus then proceeded to claim the Jews had arrested him, with some Greek manuscripts adding they were about to judge him according to Jewish law before Lysias (the commander) took him by force. Of course, Luke has already shown that the Jews tried to kill Paul (Acts 21:30-31), and the Roman commander already informed the governor about this (Acts 23:27). Tertullus concluded that the governor could discern the truth, and the other Jews also joined the accusations.

24:10-13. Paul began his defense before the governor with respectful remarks about the governor (as a judge of the nation for likely around seven years at this point) rather than insincere flattery. Paul was not afraid of the truth and was glad to give his defense, as Jesus had promised to be with His apostles in such times (Luke 21:12-15). Paul indicated that the governor could easily verify the events of what happened because only a short time had passed since his arrest (mentioning twelve days, either since he arrived in Jerusalem or between his arrival and arrest). In response to the charges, Paul said the Jews didn't find him arguing with anyone or causing any disturbance in the city. Paul also stated that the Jews could not prove their charges.

24:14-16. Rather than being guilty of what they had accused him of, Paul admitted to worshiping the God of his ancestors according to the Way (Jesus, John 14:6). But this was not a sect like his accusers had claimed. Instead, this Way stemmed from the belief in all the Law and Prophets (as their fulfillment, Matthew 5:17-18)! Paul held to a hope in God concerning the resurrection of both the righteous and unrighteous (John 5:28-29), which many Jews accepted (perhaps motioning to the Pharisees). Of course, Paul recognized that this hope was intimately tied to Jesus's resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). Therefore, Paul always strove to live with a clear/blameless conscience before both God and people (Acts 23:1).

24:17-21. Paul said the circumstances that brought him to Jerusalem centered around bringing charitable gifts and offerings to the Jewish people (the Christians there, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Romans 15:25-27). Per the suggestion of the elders of the Jerusalem church (Acts 21:20-25), Paul went to the temple ritually purified without any crowd or uproar (thereby not being an agitator, v. 5). That is how the Jews from Asia found him (Acts 21:27). These Jews should have been there to accuse Paul if the accusations had been true but seem to have been nowhere to be found. Or, the Jews who were present (of the Sanhedrin) should accuse him of the wrongdoing he did when he was before the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30-23:10), if there was anything wrong. The only accusation they could honestly make concerned Paul's statement about being on trial in connection with the resurrection of the dead!

PAUL'S VERDICT IS POSTPONED (ACTS 24:22-27)

24:22-23. Governor Felix was well-informed about the Way. This likely implies that Felix knew followers of Christ were not revolutionaries. Rather than making an immediate decision in the case, however, Felix adjourned the hearing and waited for Lysias (the commander from Jerusalem) to arrive. Until then, Paul was ordered to be kept in custody, though given some freedoms and allowed to have visitors to provide for his needs. Note there is no record of Felix calling for Lysias or this ever happening.

24:24-27. After several days, Felix and his wife Drusilla (the Jewish daughter of Herod Agrippa I, Acts 12) came (perhaps from a trip) and sent for Paul to listen to him. Paul used the opportunity to discuss faith in Jesus Christ. This discussion about faith in Christ included a discussion about righteousness (God's righteousness, being right with God), the need for self-control, and the coming judgment of God. Felix became afraid, being convicted of his unrighteous standing before God (history shows Felix and Drusilla were in an adulterous marriage). Yet, Felix delayed his obedience to the gospel until a more convenient time (note that there is no record of Felix ever obeying). Furthermore, Felix hoped Paul would offer him money to be released and sent for Paul often, and talked with him. Rather than releasing Paul on the merits of his innocence, Felix left Paul in prison for two years to gain favor with the Jews through the end of his governorship (59 A.D.). Porcius Festus then took his place.

PAUL BEFORE GOVERNOR FESTUS (ACTS 25:1-12)

25:1-5. After Festus began his work as governor, he went to Jerusalem and met with the Jewish leaders. After two years, these leaders were still concerned about Paul and brought the charges to the governor's attention (asking for a sentence of condemnation, Acts 25:15). They requested that Paul be brought to Jerusalem (with the intention of setting an ambush and killing him). However, Festus did not consent and offered to hold a hearing in Caesarea.

25:6-12. After Festus returned to Caesarea, he held a hearing for Paul. The Jews who had come from Jerusalem again levied many serious charges that they could not prove. Then, Paul asserted he had done nothing wrong regarding the Jewish Law, the temple, or Caesar. Wanting to please the Jews, Festus asked if Paul would be willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried. Paul, however, asserted his innocence and Festus's knowledge of such. He was willing to be killed if he was deserving, but used his rights as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar rather than be unjustly condemned at the hands of the Jews. Festus agreed to send him to Caesar.

CONCLUSION

The apostle Paul had already spent two years unjustly imprisoned, despite Governor Felix knowing his innocence. Now, Governor Festus demonstrated he was also unwilling to do what was right. The story now turns to Paul's attempt to appeal his case to the emperor of Rome.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What accusations did Tertullus bring against Paul?

How did Paul respond to the charges before Governor Felix?

What did Paul "admit" to?

How did Paul confront those responsible for his imprisonment before Governor Felix?

What did Governor Felix decide in Paul's case?

What did Paul discuss with Governor Felix privately?

What did the Jews request of Governor Festus regarding Paul?

How was Paul's case before Governor Festus concluded?

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