

UNSTOPPABLE

GOD'S WORK
IN THE WORLD

VILLAGE BIBLE
CHURCH



NO NEED TO HURRY— YOU HAVE PLENTY OF TIME

Lesson 21

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DEVOTIONAL

A legend tells of the devil summoning his evil forces to consider how best to keep the world on his side. One demon said, “Send me. I will tell them that there is no God.” Satan replied, “They will never believe you. Most of them know that there is a God.” Another said, “Send me. I’ll tell them that there is no heaven or hell.” Satan shook his head, “That will never do. They know that there is life after death.” Then a third spoke, “Send me. I’ll tell them there is a God, a heaven, and a hell, but there’s no hurry to decide.” “Ah,” said Satan with satisfaction, “that is the best plan!” He was sent out into the world to spread this lie (source unknown).

That demon was surely at work in the case of Felix. Here was a man with the opportunity of a lifetime, to listen to none other than the apostle Paul preach the gospel to him and his wife personally. But Paul’s preaching went to meddling and got a bit too close for comfort. Felix should have responded as the trembling Philippian jailer did, by asking, “What must I do to be saved?” Instead, Felix became frightened and told Paul, “Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you” (24:25). He did summon Paul often after that, but he never trembled again. He missed the opportunity to be saved because of the excuse that he didn’t have time for God.

Each of us needs to ponder Felix’s excuse, “when I find time.” We all live busy lives. Many things crowd into our daily schedules. We all know that we should make time for God, but we’re prone to think, “I’ll do that later, when I find the time. Right now, I’ve got too heavy of a schedule.” “As soon as the semester is over, I’ll find time for God.” “As soon as I get through the current pressured time at work, I’ll make time for God.” “As soon as the kids get into school, I’ll make time for God.” “When I’m older, after I’ve had some fun in life, then I’ll make time for God.” And so life slips by, the things of God fade from view, and we miss our opportunity, just as Felix did.

Felix and his wife Drusilla were colorful characters whose lives sound like a modern TV series. He was a slave in the household of Antonia, the daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia, and the mother of the Roman emperor Claudius. Felix and his brother, Pallas, were given their freedom and rose to positions of great influence during Claudius’ reign. Pallas became the chief accountant to the public treasury and amassed enormous wealth. Through his connections in high places, Felix got appointed as governor of Judea, a position that he held probably from A.D. 52–59.

In his personal life, from a worldly point of view, Felix had not done badly for a slave. His first wife was the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. Drusilla was his third wife, a famous beauty whom he seduced from her husband, a king in Syria. She was about 18 or 19 when Paul spoke to them here. She was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, who executed James and planned to do the same to Peter (Acts 12). She was the sister of Agrippa II and Bernice (Acts 25:13 ff.), who were rumored to be living together in incest. Bernice later became the lover of the Roman general Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Drusilla and Felix had a son who was killed in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79. You can see why I said that their story sounds like a modern soap opera!

This vignette of Paul's encounter with Felix and Drusilla gives us some principles that will enable us to find time for God:

To find time for God, we must seize present opportunities, deal with known sin, and establish proper priorities.¹

OPEN IT

1. **Are you a person who is always on time or are you chronically late? Are there any reasons for this pattern?**

READ IT

Acts 24:1–27

EXPLORE IT

2. **What three people or groups came from Jerusalem to accuse Paul before Felix?**
3. **What accusations do they bring against Paul?**
4. **What reason does Paul give for being in Jerusalem?**
5. **What is Felix's response to Paul's private conversations with him?**

¹ Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-63-no-time-god-acts-2424-27>

APPLY IT

In the next three chapters of Acts (24–26), we can be excused if we experience something of déjà vu. Paul is going to be “on trial” three times: before Felix (Acts 24:1–21), before Festus (Acts 25:6–12), and again before Agrippa and Festus (Acts 25: 23–26:32).

So far in the proceedings, as Paul has spoken before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1–11) and earlier before the crowd in the temple (Acts 22:1–21), the order of pretrial hearings has been in view. In Acts 24, we come to the trial proper. Luke records it so as to set Paul in contrast with the lawyer Tertullus. What took place in these proceedings was, if Roman law was followed, recorded and the minutes taken on board the ship that took Paul to Rome. It was perhaps here that Luke (who may not have been present at the trial itself) had access to them, in addition to the apostle’s later recollection of the events.

Central to the proceedings was a standard form: (1) members of the prosecution appear before the governor and report its case, (2) the accused is summoned, (3) the prosecution makes its accusations, (4) the defendant responds to the charges, (5) and the judge makes his ruling regarding the case. Roman law in such cases followed an “accusatorial” rather than an “inquisitorial” course—the burden of proof lay with the accuser, who would confront the accused face-to-face, after which the accused would make his apologia, or defense. In cases such as this one, the governor exercised a considerable power: he could decide the case immediately and give summary judgment or, as will be the case here, he could postpone the judgment, preventing the trial from proceeding for an indefinite period, the accused remaining under arrest the entire time.

We see elements of all these issues in Luke’s description of what happened, including the all-too-common resort to bribery that often accompanied legal proceedings in the Roman Empire. Innocence was not in itself a guarantee of acquittal, but the apostle’s Christian ethic will not allow him to subvert the process of law, even if it might cost him his life. At the close of chapter 23, Governor Felix had ordered that Paul be kept in Herod’s palace until his accusers arrived in Caesarea. Then “after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul” (Acts 24:1). A “spokesman” (Gk. *rhetor*) is in all likelihood more than just an orator; he is a legal advocate or lawyer. What follows divides into three sections: (1) the prosecution (Acts 24:1–9); (2) the defense (Acts 24: 10–21); and (3) the outcome (Acts 24:22–27).²

- 6. As you read the text, put into your own words what the situation looks like for Paul before Felix. How would you respond and what type of emotions would you be experiencing if you were in Paul’s shoes?**

Butter Me Up, Buttercup!

Five days after Paul arrived in Caesarea, “Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus.” The term “came down,” says Phillips, “pictures a flock of vultures descending on the prey.” The scene that unfolds is somewhat reminiscent of the trial of Jesus. Truly, the sheep were without shepherds. Paul’s greatest enemies—like ours—were the religious. Tertullus was not exactly the epitome of an upstanding legal professional. His testimony was a complete misrepresentation of the facts. He was wise in the ways of the world, however, for he knew that flattery (vv. 2–3) was his best chance of maligning Paul. Tertullus’ strategy—having begun with flattery—was to paint a picture of Paul as a leader in political sedition. He “knew that the governors were unwilling to convict on purely religious charges and therefore tried to give a political twist to the religious charge.” Consider some of the false charges levelled against the apostle.³

² Thomas, Derek W. H. *Acts (Reformed Expository Commentaries)* (p. 662). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

³ Sermon excerpt from Doug Van Meter found @ <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/falsely-accused/>

7. Paul experiences a 1st-century bullying session by his accusers. What advantages can a group of people have over a single person whom they seek to destroy in an argument or confrontation? How were the authorities able to level the playing field for Paul against such odds? What are some modern-day examples of this?

Flattery can be defined as “the act of giving excessive compliments, generally for the purpose of ingratiating oneself with the subject.” The difference between flattery and a compliment is the benefactor. Flattery has a selfish motivation. The flatterer hopes to gain approval or advantage over the one being flattered. Compliments, however, are sincere acknowledgments of admiration spoken to praise someone else. A compliment is intended to benefit the recipient, whereas flattery benefits the flatterer.⁴

8. The prosecuting lawyer seeks the upper hand by speaking well of Felix. Is it ever wise for a Christian to give words of flattery to someone else? When has giving or receiving flattery gotten the best of you?

The People’s Court

The delegation from Jerusalem charged Paul on three counts: First, he was a worldwide troublemaker (Greek: *loimos*—a pest, a plague). Second, he was ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Third, he violated the sanctity of the Temple by bringing in Greeks. In the tradition of successful lawyers everywhere, Tertullus put his clients’ unique spin on the facts. According to his made-for-the-courtroom yarn, the Jews narrowly averted disaster by taking Paul into custody (Acts 24:7). The lawyer-propagandist makes the lynch mob of Acts 21:30–31 sound like an orderly police action!⁵

9. Paul has three very serious accusations leveled against him. What can we learn from this situation as to why people today might accuse us of wrongdoing?

10. Paul’s accusers call him “a plague.” While the religious leaders viewed Christianity with hostility, in what ways is this a good description of God’s unstoppable work?

⁴ “What does the Bible say about flattery?” found @ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-flattery.html>

⁵Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5177-5180). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

11. How do people you are most closely associated with view your Christianity?

12. What trouble had Paul caused during his 12 days in Jerusalem? What type of trouble can the gospel and our preaching cause today?

The Jewish leadership charged Paul with being a religious heretic, a “ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). There were other sects with which Rome had to contend, Jewish sects at that, but this Nazarene sect is being made out to be the most dangerous of all.⁶

13. How would a growing sect of Christians be a threat to the Jewish establishment and the Roman Empire? How can our world today be threatened by a growing number of Christians?

Nazarenes was a derisive term for the followers of Jesus, who was from Nazareth and was called the Nazarene (cf. 6:14; John 1:46; 7:41, 52). Although it appears only in Acts, that title must have been commonly used, since Tertullus did not explain it to Felix.⁷

14. Christians in the first century were known as followers of “Jesus the Nazarene.” In what ways can we make more of our association with Jesus to the watching world around us?

⁶ Thomas, Derek W. H. *Acts (Reformed Expository Commentaries)* (p. 664). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁷ MacArthur, John. *Acts 13–28 MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series) (Kindle Locations 5684–5686). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

The “No Spin” Zone

Paul’s integrity enabled him to give a calm, straightforward reply to the accusations against him. He lived openly before God and men, and thus he didn’t have to weave a tale of half-truths or misleading statements to defend himself. He simply spoke the truth, refuting each of the charges in order.

15. **Paul seems to keep his cool and brings clarity to the situation instead of escalating and returning false accusations back on his accusers. How do you respond when wrongfully accused? What can you learn from Paul that will serve you well in the future?**

Only twelve days had elapsed since Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem (24:11), and he had given his accusers no ground for their charges against him. He had committed no breach of the peace, no sacrilege against the Temple. The Asian Jews who had charged him with violating its sanctity should have been present in court as witnesses if they had any accusation to press. The fact that they played no part at all in any of Paul’s judicial hearings shows how baseless their charges were. The only action on Paul’s part that led to any trouble was his throwing the apple of discord among the members of the Sanhedrin by his affirmation about resurrection (23:6–10), and this was scarcely an offence against any law, Jewish or Roman.⁸

16. **Read 1 Peter 2:12. How can an upright and holy life help in times of unwarranted accusations? Are there any areas that your accusers could point to in your life to substantiate their false claims?**

Acts 24:16

*So I **always take pains** to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.*

Hebrews 10:22

*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts **sprinkled clean from an evil conscience** and our bodies washed with pure water.*

17. **What does Paul mean in verse 16? How do we know if our consciences are directing us properly? Where is your conscience clear and what areas need a second look?**

⁸ Bruce, F.F. *Acts: A Bible Study Commentary* (Kindle Locations 2113–2117). Kingsley Books. Kindle Edition.

18. What should we do when our consciences are not clear before God or other people?

“I Ain't Got Time for That!”

We are introduced in this section to Felix’s wife, Drusilla. In fact, she was his third wife, whom he had seduced at age sixteen from her husband. She was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (see Acts 12) and was Jewish. Luke says that he had “more accurate knowledge of the Way.” We can assume that he had learned about Judaism from Drusilla.

Felix was kind to Paul—but greedy too, hoping that Paul would bribe him. William Ramsay suggested that Paul came from a wealthy family, and that Felix knew of this. Perhaps—or perhaps, having heard of the material relief that Paul had brought to the Jewish church (v. 17), he expected that Paul might use some of that wealth to buy his way out of trouble.

Regardless, we must again be impressed by Paul’s boldness. When interviewed by Felix and Drusilla, he preached what they needed to hear. “He reasoned,” writes Luke, “about righteousness, self-control, and the judgement to come.” He knew that they needed the bad news before they would be ready to hear the good news, and he was not ashamed to let them know the bad news. He refused to compromise. Sadly, despite his fear, Felix was not sufficiently moved. As Phillips says, “For Felix it was his moment of decision. Eternity swung in the balance. But he let the moment pass and made the common excuse: ‘Some other time.’”⁹

19. Is it difficult for you to transition ordinary conversations into gospel conversations when engaging unbelievers? If so, why? What does our passage teach us about how to do that more effectively?

20. Felix seemed to have little time to think or act upon Paul’s words to him and his wife. How about you? What about “righteousness, self-control, and the judgement to come” do you need to think and act upon? What things must be set aside for this to be possible?

⁹ Sermon excerpt from Doug Van Meter found @ <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/falsely-accused/>

Note: This study was compiled, and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups