

# **The Bible Notebook**

# **THE BOOK OF ACTS**

*The Ministry of the Holy Spirit*

*Volume 7*

*(Chapters 23-25)*

*A Verse by Verse Study*

By

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# DEDICATION

To

My Friend

**Dr. William R. Cooper**

Middlesex, England

*Author, **After the Flood, and Old Light on the Roman Church***

*(Absolutely amazing!)*

&

*Editor, **The 1388 Wycliffe NT and 1526 Tyndale NT***

*(Which you “translated” into modern English)*

*(Just as amazing!)*

## THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

This is the seventh volume in this study of the Book of Acts. I introduced my 1998 commentary on Philippians, *UNDEFEATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*, with the following note:

“The Bible Notebook is as much a product of church Bible conferences and Seminary Extension classes as the pastor’s study and pulpit. The format is a little different

from most commentaries in that it is a verse by verse study, with comments on key words and phrases. In the average commentary, the Bible student turns to the passage he, or she, is studying and after reading the Scripture, proceeds to read the commentary, sometimes a few paragraphs, but at times pages of comments. He is reading the material because he is looking for help with a particular verse. But, since most writers do not identify each verse in the commentary, he is not sure when, or if, he will find help with the verse with which he needs help. I have read pages of commentary looking for help with a specific verse without being able to identify that verse, only to reread it and discover that the writer skipped my verse. Or, possibly when I located the verse there was a note telling me to go back to a previous book, chapter, or verse and read there the commentary on the subject.

“The late Dr. Luther Hall, Director of Missions for the Northeast Louisiana Baptist Association and the Morehouse Baptist Association, began recommending me to pastors who were looking for someone to teach various books of the Bibles when I was about twenty-eight or twenty-nine years of age. For more than thirty years I have preached through many books of the Bible, taught them to my people, and for most of that time averaged teaching various books four to six times a year in other churches and in Seminary Extension classes. *The Bible Notebook* was developed from my study in preparation for those studies. The method used in *The Bible Notebook* assures you that you will find something on the verse which interests you enough to motivate you to look it up in the first place. Then, if the commentary is too limited or inadequate, you may turn to a more formal commentary for the help you need. This format is followed from beginning to end, even though it may lead to a certain amount of repetition. This avoids the problem encountered in various study Bibles, in which you are frequently asked to “see notes” on a verse in a previous chapter” [Sanders, Johnny L., UNDEFEATED, pp. 8-9).

While the commentary on Philippians is fully documented with end-notes and bibliography, many of the verse by verse studies in the Bible Notebook Series are only documented within the body of each study. I do not view these studies as finished commentaries, but simply as my Bible Notebook. Both *The Bible Notebook* and *The Sermon Notebook* are posted on the PastorLife.Com web site, edited by Dr. Mike Minnix of the Georgia Baptist Convention. This is the thirty-sixth volume in *The Bible Notebook* Series, and no one could be more surprised than I that I completed the first one!

There is one further note: **It is assumed in these studies that the Bible is the Word of God.** Period. I have gone through the complete evolutionary process spanned by the Battle for the Bible in America. First, it was enough to say “the Bible”, or the “Word of God”. Then we had to add that it is the “Inspired Word of God”, to which some would demand to know, “Do you mean verbal inspiration? Do you believe God handed it down mechanically?” My brother Mike and I once gave a very highly placed denominational worker, responsible for editing and publishing Sunday School quarterlies for youth, a ride following a convention. This person ranted about a pastors who “believe the Bible is verbally inspired” and, she added, “they call and accuse us of being liberal!”

We moved on to “Infallible Word of God”, and when they found loop holes in that, we began using the word “Inerrant”. At one time it was sufficient to identify oneself as an Evangelical Christian, but today the media uses that term to identify anyone who is not Catholic, Mormon, nor a “Right-wing Fundamentalist”.

I consider myself a Biblicist. To me the Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, the perfect Word of the perfect God. Please don't worry about me. If I am taking the Word of God too seriously, I will soon be with Him and He will explain it to me. Having said that, let me confess that **what I need most is to read the Bible, believe it, and apply it, not debate it with fellow believers.** It is a little like debating an atheist (you know, the person who says, “God knows, I'm an atheist”!). You are tempted to say to the atheist, “If I am wrong I won't know anything about it, but if you are wrong you will think of nothing else for all eternity.” As for me, I long for greater understanding of the Word of God, remembering that Paul wrote: “For now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).

America's attitude toward the Bible today is disturbing. For many years, I taught four to six Bible studies each year, and I missed a clear signal that something was wrong. When I went to teach these Bible studies in churches I observed that most of the people who attended them were median and senior adults. I began one study immediately after an ice storm and wondered if anyone would be there. I was pleasantly pleased when a good crowd showed up for the study: almost all of them senior adults! I reasoned that young adults had children and didn't want to bring them out in bad weather. Young women were working and did not have time to pick up children at child care, get the meal, and get the children to bed and still make it to the Bible study.

Now those young adults are median adults, on the way toward becoming senior adults, and many of them don't really want their church to schedule a Winter Bible Conference. They are simply not interested. However, they have time for movies, school events, ball games, and restaurants. I find it especially disturbing that the World War II generation is called The Greatest Generation, when in reality, after fighting for our freedom many of them came home and became the most permissive parents in the history of America. They were determined that their children would not “have it as hard as we did during the Depression.” Many had seen their families go through the hardships associated with war and I suppose they felt that they needed to make it up to them. They were also the first generation that had time for vacations and the first generation that could afford to take vacations. This generation had automobiles, boats, planes, radios, televisions, telephones and theaters that showed movies that would have shocked their parents. This was the first generation to reap the natural harvest of the seed sown in Scopes trial in Tennessee in 1925, when the ACLU sued to have evolution taught as an alternate theory to Creation. Those troops returned home to find a society in which Creation could not be taught as an alternate theory to evolution.

I have often said that if you want to sell a society on abortion, pornography, immorality, homosexuality, euthanasia, and embryonic stem cell research, first sell them on evolution. All

evolutionists will never be sold on all those evils, but it makes it easier to sell many people on them for the simple reason that if you don't have a Creator at the beginning, you don't need a Redeemer in the middle, because you cannot have a Judge at the end.

Francis Schaeffer said that America entered the post-Christian period in her history. In 1935, and while it may have been a little later in the Bible Belt, the deeper we go into the post-Christian era the more signs we see of moral depravity. Talk show host Laura Ingraham calls what we are seeing the "pornification" of our society. Many Christians are see it played out in the celebration of Christmas. The following excerpt from the Gary Bauer Newsletter dated, Monday, December 17, 2007, will illustrate how widespread the attack on Christ is in America by secularists:

### War On Christmas Continues

"The Left's war on Christmas continues this year. **Barbara Walters**, co-host of *ABC's The View*, spent much of last Thursday's show grumbling about receiving **a Christmas card from President and Mrs. Bush that included a Bible verse**. Walters said, "First of all, let me show you the cover of the White House, which is nice and bland...so that's pleasant enough. This is what interested me, that it is a religious card. Usually, in the past when I have received a Christmas card, it's been 'happy holidays' and so on..." **The scripture verse Walters was so irritated about says:** 'You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You gave life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.'

"Walters seemed astonished that on a *religious* holiday (which literally means "holy day") someone would want to send a *religious* greeting card. Such a complaint might seem absurd to us, but to liberal elites like Walters, **Christmas shouldn't have anything to do with anything so 'divisive' as Christ's birth**. Rather, it should be an all-inclusive celebration, a time when people from all cultures and religions can come together to celebrate equally what they hold in common.

"Following her rant, and even as her co-hosts attempted to steer the conversation towards a new topic, Walters repeatedly returned to her bafflement over the Christmas card. "Don't you think it's a little interesting that the president of all the people is sending out a religious Christmas card?" Walters asked. **She then showed her co-hosts a card sent to her by Elton John and his "partner"** that had angels on the cover but wished people "happy holidays." Of course, a greeting that included "Merry Christmas" would have been a curious choice for the man who recently stated publicly that all organized religions should be banned..." (Gary Bauer Newsletter, Dec. 17, 2007, bold added by this writer).

The evidence of moral decline is irrefutable to any Bible believing Christian. We must have a revival and soon. It is my conviction that many of the "programs", "plans" and "ministries" have not

brought a spiritual awakening, and they are not going to do so! Until God's people turn back to the Word of God and yield to the Holy Spirit, all those programs and plans are not going to impact this society. Yes, we must pray for revival: and I have not forgotten 2 Chron. 7:14! However, prayer that does not draw us into the Bible is disturbing to me. And please don't tell me that the Holy Spirit is leading you if you do not study and obey the Word of God, which He miraculously inspired, miraculously preserved, and miraculously illuminates the heart and mind of believers and empowers them to apply in everyday life. Paul admonition to Timothy is applicable for us today: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15, KJV).

## CHAPTER 23

### INTRODUCTION

The chapter division here is unfortunate for this section begins with 22:30: "The next day, since he wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and instructed the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to convene. Then he brought Paul down and placed him before them." Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture will be from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). The division here has historic significance. With Paul's three great missionary journeys are now behind him and he now faces what must have seemed an uncertain future. It was all in the Lord's hands.

In the first part of Acts, we have an overview of the spread of the Gospel from Pentecost forward in Jerusalem and Judea, with only limited outreach to others. Philip went to Samaria and introduced people there to faith in Jesus Christ, and Peter and John traveled north to help affirm the work among the Samaritans. Philip was then led down from Samaria to intercept an Ethiopian eunuch, a high ranking official in the court of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, and introduce him to faith in Jesus, the One of whom he was reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Peter was then supernaturally led to the home of Cornelius, a highly respected Roman centurion, where Cornelius and those of his household were saved.

There are frequent progress reports on the spread of the Gospel in and around Jerusalem, but Luke records a new step in the implementation of the Great Commission with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus where he was determined to persecute the saints in that city. Saul spent three years in study and prayer in the desert of Arabia and in Damascus before fellow believers there helped him escape the Jews who now want to kill him because he was now preaching and teaching about the same Jesus he had hated. He returned to Jerusalem and sought out believers there, only to discover that they did not trust the young Pharisee who had so fanatically persecuted the church. He was befriended by Barnabas, but when he went to the synagogues in Jerusalem to preach that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, they would have killed him. Jesus appeared to him and Paul says, "Then He said to me, 'Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles'" (Acts 22:21).

Barnabas and other leaders in the church took Saul down to Caesarea and put him on a ship bound for Tarsus, his hometown. We are not told of his work in Tarsus, but when reports of the phenomenal growth of the church in Antioch of Syria reached Jerusalem they sent Barnabas to investigate the reports and to help the church. In time, Barnabas went to Tarsus, found Saul and invited him to help him with the work in Antioch. After about a year, the Lord called Barnabas and Saul to go on a missionary trip in which they would take the Gospel deep into Gentile lands (“far away to the Gentiles”, 22:21). Paul and Barnabas planted churches on that first great missionary journey, and then Paul and Silas went on two more missionary journeys, often accompanied by Timothy, Luke, and certain others.

At the close of the Third Missionary Journey, Paul and selected representatives from churches that had given a generous offering for the relief of suffering saints in Jerusalem, arrived in Jerusalem, where Paul went to report to James, the half-brother of our Lord, and deliver the offering for the relief of needy members. When Paul was seen in the temple complex by Jews from Ephesus, they accused him of bringing Gentiles into the temple complex and a riot broke out. In their righteous zeal, they were in the process of beating Paul to death when he was “rescued” by the Roman commander Claudius Lysias, who permitted Paul to speak to the crowd. However, when he mentioned Gentiles they once again turned into an angry, hostile mob. Claudius Lysias ordered a centurion to scourge Paul, but he was spared when he identified himself as a Roman citizen. Claudius Lysias, questioned him about his Roman citizenship and then to appease the Jews, set up a meeting with the Sanhedrin. Paul will now address the Sanhedrin.

**23:1 - THE SANHEDRIN.** *“Paul looked intently at the Sanhedrin and said, ‘Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience until this day.’”* The Sanhedrin was convened at the order of Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, and Paul was escorted in so that he could stand before that esteemed body that had, many years earlier, authorized him to persecute the followers of Christ. He stood before them and “looked intently” at the members, waiting for his opportunity to speak to them. “If the prisoner was found innocent he could be released, but if the charges were valid the case could be remitted to the procurator, the Roman governor (cf. 23:26-30)” [Bible Knowledge Commentary, QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library, Parsons Technology - after this, BKC].

I cannot help but wonder about the statement that Paul “looked intently at the Sanhedrin”. It may be that he was deciding how he would begin his defense, but he may have looked intently into their eyes for effect before beginning. Certainly, he was trusting the Holy Spirit to guide him in the introduction to his defense. This shows wisdom on Paul’s part, but he was aware of the Lord’s promise that He would give His disciples the words to say under circumstances like these.

This was an August body, made up of Sadducees and Pharisees, an odd mix at best. The Pharisees left a legacy that speaks of self-righteousness, legalism, hypocrisy, and intolerance. The Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin, which was authorized to function something like a supreme court over issues pertaining to Jews. They were subject to Roman authority, but Rome found it expedient to

leave religious matters in their hands. They were even authorized to deal with religious concerning Jews in cities outside Palestine, as the letter authorizing young Saul of Tarsus to export the persecution of Christians to Damascus illustrates.

Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, headquartered in the Tower of Antonia, overlooking the temple complex, was not clear as to the charges the Jews were making against Paul, so he “instructed the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to convene. He then brought Paul down and placed him before them” (22:30). The Roman commander had the authority to order the Sanhedrin to meet to hear the case, but he permitted them certain freedom in dealing with religious matters.

One reason I am intrigued by the statement that Paul looked intently at the Sanhedrin is that I wonder if he was looking into the eyes of former friends. I find I am in good company: “He may have recognized some of his former classmates in this group” [New Commentary on the Whole Bible, New Testament, QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library, Parsons Technology - after this, NCWB]. Robertson adds an element to the speculation: “Paul may have had weak eyes, but probably the earnest gaze was to see if he recognized any faces that were in the body that tried Stephen and to which he apparently once belonged” [Word Pictures in the New Testament, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources, Tim Vineyard, Vice President, Technology Division - after this ATR]. Others infer from this exchange that poor eyesight may have been a contribution factor, but even if that had been the case, he still may have been looking for familiar faces. If there were members who remembered him, they would not have forgotten that he was a Hellenistic Jew from Tarsus, the star pupil in Gamaliel’s school for Pharisees at one time. Some believe Paul had been a member of the Sanhedrin at the time of his conversion, but I seriously doubt that. In the first he was single, and in the second place he was still a student. He had been a tool of the Sanhedrin, and some of those present must have remembered him, as he would have remembered older members.

**BROTHERS.** He may have looked intently at the member of the Sanhedrin until he had their undivided attention before speaking. Then he said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience until this day.” He begins the best way possible. By addressing them as “Brothers” he is using the traditional address a Jewish man used in addressing Jewish men in a formal setting. When he was a young man he may have addressed them as “Brothers and Fathers”. He reminds those who may know him, and informs those who do not that he was a Jew, and as such he was within his rights to enter the temple complex. However, he has more than that in mind. He had been a strict Pharisee and he was still living his life in good conscience before the Lord. His greeting was more friendly than formal. This greeting should have reassured them, and insured his protection, but as we will see, they were in no mood to hear him.

**IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE.** Now it really gets interesting. What is the role of conscience in the Christian experience? Can we apply the old adage, “Let your conscience be your guide”? Can we justify the kind of behavior he confesses in other places by citing the conscience? Some commentaries skip over this while others offer a lengthy discussion. For example, Barnes writes:

“This was a bold declaration, after the tumult, and charges, and accusations of the

previous day, Acts 22; and yet it was strictly true. His persecutions of the Christians had been conducted conscientiously. Acts 26:9, "I verily thought with myself," says he, "that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Of his conscientiousness and fidelity in their service, they could bear witness. Of his conscientiousness since, he could make a similar declaration. And he, doubtless, meant to say, that as he had been conscientious in persecution, so he had been in his conversion, and in his subsequent course. And as they knew that his former life had been with a good conscience, they ought to presume that he had maintained the same character still. This was a remarkably bold appeal to be made by an accused man, and it shows the strong consciousness which Paul had of his innocence. What would have been the drift of Paul's discourse in proving this, we can only conjecture. He was interrupted, Acts 23:2; but there can be no doubt that he would have pursued such a course of argument as should tend to establish his innocence" [Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, BARNES].

Robertson compliments Barnes and others but adds information that should be of special interest to anyone who places a great deal of emphasis on the conscience:

“In all good conscience unto this day (pasêi suneidêsei agathêi achri tautês tês hêmêras). This claim seems to lack tact, but for brevity's sake Paul sums up a whole speech in it. He may have said much more than Luke here reports along the line of his speech the day before, but Paul did not make this claim without consideration. It appears to contradict his confession as the chief of sinners (1Ti 1:13-16). **But that depends on one's interpretation of "good conscience."** The word suneidêsis is literally "joint-knowledge" in Greek, Latin (conscientia) and English "conscience" from the Latin. It is a late word from sunoida, to know together, common in O.T., Apocrypha, Philo, Plutarch, New Testament, Stoics, ecclesiastical writers. **In itself the word simply means consciousness of one's own thoughts** (Heb 10:2), or of one's own self, then consciousness of the distinction between right and wrong (Rom 2:15) with approval or disapproval. **But the conscience is not an infallible guide and acts according to the light that it has ( 1Co 8:7, 10; 1Pe 2:19). The conscience can be contaminated (Heb 10:22, evil ponêrâs).** All this and more must be borne in mind in trying to understand Paul's description of his motives as a persecutor. Alleviation of his guilt comes thereby, but not removal of guilt as he himself felt (1Ti 1:13-16)" [Word Pictures in the New Testament, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, ATR (bold added by this writer)].

What Paul may be saying to Sanhedrin is that he persecuted followers of Christ according to his “good conscience” as a strict Jew and a Pharisee (even though he was wrong). Though the modern reader may not see that, the high priest obviously did. Though he does not say so here, there may have been the implication that he was following his “good conscience” when he turned from being a persecutor of Christians to being a missionary for Christ. “It is a pointed disclaimer against the

charge that he is a renegade Jew, an opposer of the law, the people, the temple. Paul addresses the Sanhedrin as an equal and has no ‘apologies’ (in our sense) to make for his career as a whole. The golden thread of consistency runs through, as a good citizen in God's commonwealth. He had the consolation of a good conscience (1Pe 3:16)” [ATR].

The conscience is not an infallible guide, and it is no substitute for the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit that makes one’s conscience a Christian conscience. Paul’s claim seems to contradict his statement that he was the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:13ff). The Bible does not ignore the place of the conscience, but reminds us of

- 1) a good conscience - Acts 23:1; 1 Tim. 1:19; Heb. 8:18
- 2) a conscience void of offence - Acts 24:16
- 3) a weak conscience - 1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12
- 4) a pure conscience - 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3
- 5) a seared conscience - 1 Tim. 4:2
- 6) a defiled conscience - Titus 1:15
- 7) an evil conscience - Heb. 10:22

**23:2 - THE HIGH PRIEST.** *“But the high priest Ananias ordered those who were standing next to him to strike him on the mouth.”* This response from the high priest nothing less than shocking, considering his position and the fact that there was a Roman witness to this command. However, it is not so shocking when we consider his character. In fact, his response is in keeping with “what is known about him from Josephus, who described him as insolent, hot-tempered, profane, and greedy” [BKC]. To that we Josephus might have added extreme arrogance. Godless religion can be a cruel thing, as a study of the church during the Dark Ages will prove. There is a lot more evidence of abuse of power by church hierarchy than New Testament Christianity in the Crusades, yet modern Muslims inflame the hearts and minds of their children with those stories as if they had happened last year. And speaking of intolerant, violent, cruel religious leaders, it is doubtful that history has a parallel to the modern radical Muslim cleric who advocates the death of all Jews and Christians.

Ananias served as high priest from A.D. 47-58. At the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, it seemed that the appointment was being passed around within the family of Annas, whose son-in-law Chaiphaz was the high priest who helped orchestrate the death of Christ. “Ironically, at the beginning of Paul’s ministry another Ananias helped him receive his sight” [BKC]. Ananias, the high priest before whom Paul appeared, showed none of the character of our eternal High Priest.

We must remember certain things about the office of high priest at this point in history. (1) Ananias is not Aaron, and Moses is not giving him messages from Yahweh. (2) The office of high priest was no longer passed down from father to son in the line of Aaron. (3) The high priest was now appointed by Rome (at times annually, but Ananias had now served for a decade). (4) Rome appointed a members of the sect of the Sadducees to that office at this time. (5) The office of high priest was more political than religious at this time. **The**

**high priest was politically religious and religiously political.** Sadducees did not believe in the supernatural, angels, or the resurrection of the dead). That means that the high priest who entered God's Most Holy Place once each year on the Day of Atonement for himself and for all the people of Israel did not believe in atonement! He did not believe in eternal life or see a need for salvation.

Barnes has a lengthy discussion about Ananias, and I will include it here, even though it is long, because (1) the information is interesting, and (2) because it affirms the historicity of the Book of Acts.

"This Ananias was, doubtless, the son of Nebedinus, (Jos. Ant. xx. chap. v. 3,) who was high priest when Quadratus, who preceded Felix, was president of Syria. He was sent bound to Rome by Quadratus, at the same time with Ananias, the prefect of the temple, that they might give an account of their conduct to Claudius Caesar. Josephus, Ant. b. xx. chap. vi. & 2. But in consequence of the intercession of Agrippa the Younger, they were dismissed, and returned to Jerusalem. Ananias, however, was not restored to the office of high priest; for, when Felix was governor of Judea, this office was filled by Jonathan, who succeeded Ananias. Josephus, Ant. b. xx. chap. x. Jonathan was slain in the temple itself, by the instigation of Felix, by assassins who had been hired for the purpose. This murder is thus described by Josephus, (Ant. b. xx. chap. viii. 5 :)

"Felix bore an ill-will to Jonathan, the high priest, because he frequently gave him admonitions about governing the Jewish affairs better than he did, lest complaints should be made against him, since he had procured of Caesar the appointment of Felix as procurator of Judea. Accordingly, Felix contrived a method by which he might get rid of Jonathan, whose admonitions had become troublesome to him. Felix persuaded one of Jonathan's most faithful friends, of the name Doras, to bring the robbers upon him, and to put him to death"

"This was done in Jerusalem. The robbers came into the city as if to worship God, and with daggers, which they had concealed under their garments, they put him to death. After the death of Jonathan, the office of high priest remained vacant, until king Agrippa appointed Ismael, the son of Fabi, to the office. Josephus, Ant. b. xx. chap. viii. 8. It was during this interval, while the office of high priest was vacant, that the events which are here recorded took place. Ananias was then at Jerusalem; and as the office of high priest was vacant, and as he was the last person who had borne the office, it was natural that he should discharge, probably by common consent, its duties, so far at least as to preside in the sanhedrim. Of these facts Paul would be doubtless apprized; and hence what he said Acts 23:5 was strictly true, and is one of the evidences that Luke's history accords precisely with the peculiar circumstances which then existed. When Luke here calls Ananias "the high

priest," he evidently intends not to affirm that he was actually such; but to use the word as the Jews did, as applicable to one who had been ill that office, and who, on that occasion, when the office was vacant, performed its duties.

"To smite him on the mouth. To stop him from speaking; to express their indignation at what he had said. The anger of Ananias was excited, because Paul affirmed that all that he had done had been with a good conscience. Their feelings had been excited to the utmost; they regarded him as certainly guilty; they deemed him to be an apostate; and they could not bear it that he, with such coolness and firmness, declared that all his conduct had been under the direction of a good conscience. The injustice of the command of Ananias is apparent to all. A similar instance of violence occurred on the trial of the Saviour, John 18:22" [Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, BARNES].

A comparison between a faithful and obedient high priest under the Old Covenant and Jesus, our High Priest, in the Book of Hebrews is educational. In Hebrews 9-10, we see that the Aaronic high Priest had to enter the Most Holy Place once each year, on the Day of Atonement, and make atonement both for Israel and for Himself. Jesus, by contrast, offered one sacrifice and it never had to be repeated. He is the perfect High Priest, and he is the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He is the superior High Priest and His was the superior sacrifice: He offered Himself.

**23:3 - THEN PAUL SAID.** *"Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! You are sitting there judging me according to the law, and in violation of the law are you ordering me to be struck?"* Those members of the Sanhedrin may or may not have been shocked by the order from Ananias to strike Paul in the mouth, but we can be sure they are shocked now! Observe that Paul does not ask someone present to strike Ananias, nor does he express a desire to do so himself. He says, "God is going to strike you" (which demonstrates a far more biblical understanding of divine judgment than members of the Sanhedrin possessed).

Christians must understand that if they are faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ the world will hate them, and when the law permits the world will persecute, and even kill His followers. The world hates Jesus and it will hate those in whom He lives. During the presidential debates between Republican candidates during the latter part of 2007, the media went through an interesting, chameleon-like change with reference to former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee. First, he had no chance. Then he began climbing from the bottom tier of candidates into the upper tier. Until that time, the fickle media seemed to focus on Governor Mitt Romney's Mormon faith, but as Huckabee gained support, they began to pit Huckabee against Romney. When he continued to climb into the top tier of candidates, the media paraded out one biter, caustic critic after another, until his numbers began to slip, and then some gloated. On Hannity and Colmes, December 19, 2007 (as I recall), there was a clip of some radio personality I had never heard of before, who was ranting against Huckabee, and I will paraphrase: "He claims to be a Christian but he wants to kill people with bombs

dropped from forty thousand feet. That may be his kind of Christianity, but **THAT IS NOT MY KIND OF CHRISTIANITY!**” Arrogance was dripping from every word as the man spoke. Why such vitriol toward Mike Huckabee? Read 1 John, chapter 4 for the Lord’s answer to that question. This is not a political endorsement of Governor Huckabee, but a reminder of the attitude of the world toward serious Christians.

**WHITEWASHED WALL.** The KJV has the more familiar, “whited sepulcher.” It is the same Greek word used in Matthew 23:27. Robertson calls this “a picturesque way of calling Ananias a hypocrite, undoubtedly true, but not a particularly tactful thing for a prisoner to say to his judge, not to say Jewish high priest. Besides, Paul had hurled back at him the word *tupein* (smite) in his command, putting it first in the sentence (*tupein se mellei ho theos*) in strong emphasis. Clearly Paul felt that he, not Ananias, was living as a good citizen in God's commonwealth” [ATR].

In my youth, I heard various preachers, and as I recall, professors at Mississippi College, explain the more familiar “whited sepulcher”. According to them, people would periodically whitewash their family sepulcher, and the idea here is that no matter how often one might whitewash the sepulcher, inside it there was only a decaying body (or bones). Ananias looked officially religious on the outside but he dead and decaying inwardly. “Jesus too in His trials was struck on the mouth and challenged the legality of it (John 18:20-23)” [BKC].

**YOU ARE...JUDGING ME.** To Paul this is incredible: “You are sitting there judging me according to the law, and in violation of the law are you ordering me to be struck?” When it came to the Law, Paul knew it was well as anyone there. As a matter of fact, had outperformed all his peers in the study of the law in the school of Gamaliel, and that may have included some of the members of the Sanhedrin whom he was facing now. In fact, he may have had some of those present in mind when he wrote to the Philippians:

“Watch out for “dogs,” watch out for evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh— although I once had confidence in the flesh too. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless” (Phil 3:2-6).

**23:4 - DO YOU DARE?** “*And those standing nearby said, “Do you dare revile God’s high priest?”*” If it is true that Ananias was no longer the official high priest, this is especially ironic. “It is remarkable that they who knew that he was not the high priest should have offered this language. He was, however, in the place of the high priest, and they might have pretended that respect was due to the office” [BARNES].

**23:5 - I DID NOT KNOW.** “*I did not know, brothers,” Paul said, “that it was the high priest.*”

*For it is written, You must not speak evil of a ruler of your people.*” Either Paul did not recognize the speaker, he did not know he was serving unofficially in the capacity of the high priest, or he is underscoring the fact that Ananias was not the official high priest. Robertson provides a critical discussion here:

“The Greek naturally means that Paul did not know that it was the high priest who gave the order to smite his mouth. If this view is taken, several things may be said by way of explanation. The high priest may not have had on his official dress as the meeting was called hurriedly by Lysias. Paul had been away so long that he may not have known Ananias on sight. And then Paul may have had poor eyesight or the high priest may not have been sitting in the official seat. Another way of explaining it is to say that Paul was so indignant, even angry, at the command that he spoke without considering who it was that gave the order. The Greek allows this idea also. At any rate Paul at once recognizes the justice of the point made against him. [ATR].

Those who try to identify Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:17), often conclude that it was poor eyesight, and they can make a good case for it. Paul signed the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: “This greeting is in my own hand—Paul. This is a sign in every letter; this is how I write” (2 Thess 3:17). Paul used an amanuensis (stenographer) when he wrote the various epistles, possibly because of poor eyesight. Some believe he signed that letter to the Thessalonians with a “large” hand and that the believers there would have recognized it because of the large signature. It is this reasoning that leads some to the conclusion that Paul did not recognize the high priest because of his eyesight, but if he had been able to determine where the person was seated who ordered someone to strike Paul, he would have had an idea as to the identity of the speaker. It is possible that in this hurriedly convened meeting Ananias may not have been wearing the vestments of the high priest.

**BROTHERS.** Paul is still using the title expected when one addressed such a body of religious leaders as this. He is showing respect for his fellow Jews, recognizing their position, and at the same time identifying himself as a fellow Jew.

**IT IS WRITTEN.** Paul says, “For it is written, You must not speak evil of a ruler of your people.” He acknowledges the fact that he had been guilty of showing “irreverence against the office of high priest as the passage from Ex 22:18 (LXX) shows and confesses his fault, but the rebuke was deserved. Jesus did not threaten (1Pe 2:23) when smitten on the cheek (John 18:22), but he did protest against the act and did not turn the other cheek” [ATR].

**23:6 - WHEN PAUL REALIZED.** “*When Paul realized that one part of them were Sadducees and the other part were Pharisees, he cried out in the Sanhedrin, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees! I am being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead!”* Paul was aware of his surrounding: he was standing before the Sanhedrin; Claudius Lysias was observing the proceedings to see if the Sanhedrin could to provide evidence that would either convict or exonerate him. He had both the background and experience to know there was no way he was going to get a fair hearing before this body, especially with a narrow-minded, arrogant, heartless leader like

Ananias. He was also aware of the fact that the Sanhedrin was made up of two factions that hated each other, but were forced to work together in order to try to cope with their nation's subjugation to Rome. There were, in fact, several sects or parties in Judaism at the time: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. One man in the New Testament is called a Zealot, and from extra-biblical sources we learn of the Essenes.

**PHARISEES.** It must have been a dramatic moment when Paul, realizing that he was not going to receive a fair hearing, cried out, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees!" He may have seemed a little out of control to an uninformed observer, but he knew exactly what he was doing. They were set to judge and without a doubt, condemn him, but he was about to shout fighting words that would incite a conflict between members of the two religious parties that made up the Sanhedrin.

The party or sect within Judaism we read about most in the Gospels is that of the Pharisees. There are articles in most dictionaries and encyclopedias that shed some light on this group, but I believe the article in the Holman Standard Bible is both concise and informative enough for our purpose. I will include almost all of the article so that the reader might not have to take a break and go elsewhere for more information:

"Pharisees The Pharisees constituted the most important group. They appear in the Gospels as the opponents of Jesus. Paul claimed that he was a Pharisee before becoming a Christian (Phil. 3:5). They were the most numerous of the groups, although Josephus stated that they numbered only about six thousand. They controlled the synagogues and exercised great control over the general population.

"No surviving writing gives us information about the origin of the Pharisees. The earliest reference to them is dated in the time of Jonathan (160-143 B.C.), where Josephus refers to Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Their good relations with the rulers ended in the time of John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.). They came to power again when Salome Alexandra became queen (76 B.C.).

"The name "Pharisee" means "the separated ones." It may mean that they separated themselves from the masses of the people or that they separated themselves to the study and interpretation of the law. It is usually assumed that they were the spiritual descendants of the Hasidim, the loyal fighters for religious freedom in the time of Judas Maccabeus. They appear to be responsible for the transformation of Judaism from a religion of sacrifice to one of law. They were the developers of the oral tradition, the teachers of the two-fold law: written and oral. They saw the way to God as being through obedience to the law. They were the progressives of the day, willing to adopt new ideas and adapt the law to new situations.

"The Pharisees were strongly monotheistic. They accepted all the Old Testament as authoritative. They affirmed the reality of angels and demons. They had a firm belief

in life beyond the grave and a resurrection of the body. They were missionary, seeking the conversion of Gentiles (Matt. 23:15). They saw God as concerned with the life of a person without denying that the individual was responsible for how he or she lived. They had little interest in politics. The Pharisees opposed Jesus because He refused to accept the teachings of the oral law” [Holman Bible Dictionary, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this HBD].

**SADDUCEES.** The Holman Bible Dictionary is once again the source of the following brief article on this sect:

“The Sadducees were the aristocrats of the time. They were the party of the rich and the high priestly families. They were in charge of the Temple and its services. They claimed to be descendants of Zadok, high priest in the time of Solomon. However, the true derivation of their name is unknown. In all our literature, they stand in opposition to the Pharisees. They sought to conserve the beliefs and practices of the past. They opposed the oral law, accepting the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, as the ultimate authority. The Sadducees were materialistic in their outlook. They did not believe in life after death or any reward or punishment beyond this life. They denied the existence of angels and demons. They did not believe that God was concerned with what people did. Rather people were totally free. They were politically oriented, supporters of ruling powers, whether Seleucids or Romans. They wanted nothing to threaten their position and wealth, so they strongly opposed Jesus” [HBD].

**RESURRECTION.** Paul cried out, “I am being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead!” Knowing he would receive no justice from the sanhedrin because of his association with Gentiles, he decided to throw fuel on a simmering fire of hatred that had long existed between these two sects, a fire that even with great diplomacy, they had only managed to keep under control. The fear of Rome was their motivation for working together. Suddenly, instead of attacking Paul, they began attacking each other.

**23:7 - A DISPUTE BROKE OUT.** “*When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.*” The Holy Spirit, who had guided the Apostle to the Gentiles during all the years on the mission field, was not about to fail him here. Paul may well have deduced the potential outcome well enough to know that he was not going to convince anyone in the Sanhedrin that Jesus was the Messiah, and he knew the attitudes of the various sects within Judaism well enough to realize he could drive a wedge between them. However, to realize this and act on it so quickly seems amazing. As soon as he mentioned the Resurrection they forgot about him and began attacking each other. He could not expect justice, so he “thought it best thus to divide the council, by introducing a question on which the Pharisees and Sadducees were at issue. He did so; and the Pharisees immediately espoused his side of the question, because in opposition to the Sadducees, whom they abhorred, as irreligious men” [Adam Clarke’s Commentary, the Bible Navigator, an electronic Bible library, LifeWay Christian Resources - after

this, CLARKE].

**23:8 - THE SADDUCEES SAY.** *“For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, and no angel or spirit, but the Pharisees affirm them all.”* Luke, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the Book of Acts, the Book of History in the New Testament, tells us at the beginning that he had researched everything of which he writes very carefully, and now he succinctly lists the basic beliefs of the Sadducees. They were secular, political, and materialistic. Apart from the approval and support they received from Roman authorities, one can hardly justify a Sadducee on the Sanhedrin, which was, in essence, the religious supreme court of the Jews. However, they dominated the Sanhedrin, held the office of high priest and, with the cooperation of the Pharisees, handled religious issues among the Jews. And that kept Rome happy. Politics makes strange bedfellows! The Sadducees were materialistic, and by keeping control of the Sanhedrin they could protect their wealth. This clearly motivated their opposition to Jesus, because they did not have the religious zeal that motivated the Pharisees.

**PHARISEES AFFIRM THEM ALL.** These two Jewish sects could hardly have had less in common. The Pharisees affirmed the resurrection, angels, and the reality of the spirit. All of these the Sadducees rejected, so Paul took advantage of their opposition to each other.

## OLD TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDING OF THE RESURRECTION

I have heard Bible professors stress the limited understanding the Old Testament saints had of life after death. For example, what did they believe about heaven, and did they believe in hell? My sister, Linda Furr, has mentioned friends in her area, including some in her church, who believe that the Old Testament has no application for us today because we live under the New covenant. They say Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant, so the Old Testament does not apply to us. Practically speaking, that means that the modern believer has no basis for believing in the Genesis account of creation, the Flood, the confusion of tongues and separation of people at Babel, or obedience to the Mosaic Law. When my sister asked one person if she believed we should obey the Ten Commandments, and the lady said, “No. That is in the Old Testament. Jesus taught that all those commandments are fulfilled in the two great commandments, that we should love God and love one another.”

I suggested something she might ask her friend to try. Take a copy of the Holman Christian Standard Bible and turn to the New Testament and start turning the pages. The words of Christ are in red, but when Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament it is in bold red. When any other writer quotes from the Old Testament it is in bold print. If anyone will go through the New Testament page by page, checking the bold print (possibly looking up a few passages to confirm that the quotes are accurate), he will either be convinced by the Holy Spirit that the entire Bible speaks to our needs today, or he may grow harder in his rejection of the Old Testament Scripture.

For someone who would like a better understanding of the belief in the resurrection in the Old

Testament, I would recommend a serious study of the Book of Job “If a man die, will he live again?, (KJV). I will now copy and paste a few references from the Old Testament, that show a hope in the resurrection. There will be no effort to convince anyone who rejects the Old Testament here. I will leave the apologetics to another time.

Before quoting from the Old Testament, however, I would like to remind the reader of the Transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus for some time. Moses had been dead almost 1400 years, and Elijah more than half that long. The fact that they appeared illustrates life after death, but there is more. Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the Prophets, so there is at least a hint about the resurrection in the individuals who appeared.

1) Job, in agony and despair we cannot imagine, cried out to the Lord:

“(S)o man lies down never to rise again. They will not wake up until the heavens are no more; they will not stir from their sleep. If only You would hide me in Sheol and conceal me until Your anger passes, that You would appoint a time for me and then remember me. When a man dies, will he come back to life? [If so,] **I would wait all the days of my struggle until my relief comes**” (Job 14:12-14, bold added).

While there is no definite statement about the resurrection of the dead, Job had obviously given it serious consideration. This was written somewhere around 2000 B.C., which means that it was probably the first book in the Bible to be written.

2) Then there is Daniel. As we move forward in the Old Testament we see a progressive revelation of the Lord’s plan for the ages, and I might add, it does not get any plainer than this: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, **some to eternal life, and some to shame and eternal contempt**” (Dan 12:2, bold added by this writer).

This is one of the high water marks on the resurrection in the Old Testament. Francis Schaeffer said of this passage, “In Daniel, which of course is not anywhere near so early (as Job or Abraham), there is also an emphasis on the physical resurrection - not of Christ, but of man” [Schaeffer, Francis, **True Spirituality**, in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer, A Christian World View*, Vol III, Crossway Books, Westchester, IL, 1982, p 241ff] .

3) The following quote is from the Book of Hebrews, but it concerns Abraham and Isaac:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; he who had received the promises was offering up his unique son, about whom it had been said, In Isaac your seed will be called. **He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead, from which he also got him back as an illustration**” (Heb 11:17-19, bold added).

To appreciate the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament on the subject of

the resurrection, see 1 Cor. 15. There is a lot more information and our understanding is richly expanded as we move into the New Testament. See also First and Second Thessalonians and the Revelation.

**23:9 - THE SHOUTING.** *“The shouting grew loud, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party got up and argued vehemently: ‘We find nothing evil in this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?’”* Such was their hatred for each other that “some of the scribes of the Pharisees” stood up and “argued vehemently” against the Sadducees. They hated Jesus, but under these circumstances defend Paul. “The Pharisees basically agreed with Paul’s view of resurrection and did not think any more inquiry or disturbance was necessary” [NCWB]. The Pharisees are shouting at the Sadducees, but apparently the Sadducees have not lost sight of Paul nor forgotten the charges against him.

**23:10 - BECAME VIOLENT.** *“When the dispute became violent, the commander feared that Paul might be torn apart by them and ordered the troops to go down, rescue him from them, and bring him into the barracks.”* The reader today can hardly imagine either the Sadducees or the Pharisees letting things get so out of hand, especially with the Roman commander present to observe the proceedings, but such is the nature of religious fanaticism. Both parties were set to condemn Paul until he brought up the subject of the resurrection, and now they opposed each other with such passion that “the commander feared that Paul might be torn apart by them.” So, they may have turned against each other but even though they are distracted by the argument over the resurrection, the commander still sees the danger for Paul.

This day, December 27, 2007, as I proof this chapter in the study from Acts, news broke that former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto had been assassinated in Pakistan while she was working the crowds in her bid for election to her old office after several years in exile. The day she returned there was an attempt on her life. Numerous attempts have been made on the current Prime Minister’s life, her opponent in the political race. Immediately after the news broke that someone had shot former Prime Minister Bhutto, there were riots all over Pakistan. The police will have to wait for some of the people to clam down before they can bring things under control. Every news program on the Fox News Network, and no doubt on many others, focused on the riots and demonstrations all day. One host even tried to get a guest to blame the United States for encouraging her to return in order to help promote democracy! The Roman commander had to act quickly to avoid a riot that might spill over into the streets.

Earlier, in chapter 22, I pointed out that the Romans first rescued Paul and then they placed him in custody. Here, he is now in their custody, but the commander had to send in the troops to “rescue” him when the dispute seemed to be getting out of hand. In the presence of the Roman commander, these two religious parties became so violent that he feared for Paul’s life. “Paul was in more danger in the midst of the Jews than he was in a Roman prison. So again he was brought up the steps to the army barracks at the Antonia Fortress (cf. 21:35)” [BKC]. This scene was certainly something for Claudius Lysias to write home about! Little could either the commander or the members of the Sanhedrin have imagined that roughly within a decade, the city of Jerusalem would be under siege by Roman troops under Titus. The city would be destroyed in A. D. 70, at

which time this very temple would be destroyed so completely that, as Jesus had prophesied, not one stone would be left upon another (Matt. 24:2). Anyone who witnessed the violent riots and demonstrations in Pakistan can understand how difficult crowd control can be, especially when action is not taken in time to keep it from spreading.

## Plot against Paul Exposed

**23:11 - THE LORD STOOD BY HIM.** *“The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Have courage! For as you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’”* This gets even more amazing. Paul had survived a brutal beating, been rescued, and when he spoke to his fellow Jews they had violently rejected Jesus and Paul. He must have been exhausted, drained emotionally, and confused as to what to expect next. Just when he needed it most, Jesus came and stood by him and said, “Have courage!” Paul had been faithful in taking the Gospel to the Gentiles on three great missionary journeys, but now he must have wondered if it would all end here in Jerusalem. Jesus offered the assurance he needed for that hour and the months to come.

Jesus had called Saul of Tarsus to be His witness to the Israelites, to Gentiles, and to kings and various authorities. He had begun his work in every city by going to the Jewish synagogue, if there was one there, and when he was forced out of the synagogue, he turned to the Gentiles. In Jerusalem, he has already stood before the Roman commander, but in the coming months he will be the Lord’s apostle and missionary to kings, governors, officers and soldiers.

What Paul had been through since arriving in Jerusalem had been enough to challenge any man or woman. He had been beaten by a hostile mob, taken into custody, narrowly escaped a horrendous scourging, and then he had incited a riot between the Pharisees and Sadducees, from which he had to be rescued. What could he expect next? He was about to learn that the Jews were not through with him yet. The Lord knew exactly what to do, so He appeared to him once again and said, “Have courage!” He then proceeded to give him a reason to have courage.

**TO ROME.** “For as you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” Paul had done his best to witness for Jesus in Jerusalem. He has been faithful, even if the leaders had tried to kill him. More to the point, Jesus appears and tells him he is going to Rome. Remember that he has already written an epochal epistle to the church at Rome in which, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he provides the foundation for systematic theology. In that epistle, the Lord used Paul to give us exactly what we need to know on the Doctrine of Sin, the Doctrine of Justification, and the Doctrine of Sanctification. These lessons are amplified in the other Pauline Epistles. If we get it right there at the beginning, we are going to avoid a lot of problems along the way. It was in that epistle that Paul expressed his desire to go to Rome, and then on to Spain:

**“I have strongly desired for many years to come to you whenever I travel to Spain.** For I do hope to see you when I pass through, and to be sent on my way there by you, once I have first enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, **I am**

**traveling to Jerusalem** to serve the saints; **for Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.** Yes, they were pleased, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to Jews in material needs. So when I have finished this and safely delivered the funds to them, **I will go by way of you to Spain**” (Romans 15:23b-28, bold added by this writer).

I have spent almost my entire life in the study of the Word of God, beginning in Sunday School and Training Union in a small mission church. I participated in the Junior Memory Work Drill and was perfect in the State competition. I followed that with the Intermediate Sword Drill, finishing as the second place boy in the state. I went on to earn a degree from Mississippi College, with majors in Bible and Sociology. From there I went on to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary where I was enrolled in a program which, according to an actual survey, was harder than Tulane Medical School. Later, I earned the Doctor of Ministry Degree from Luther Rice University. It was after graduating from New Orleans Seminary that I really began to study on a different level. In time, I would be compelled, I am convinced by the Holy Spirit, to expand my study of various books of the Bible until I developed the format that would become **The Bible Notebook**. In time, I would write sermon manuscripts under the title, **The Sermon Notebook**. I have sent over 150 sermons to PastorLife.Com (Georgia Baptist Convention, Dr. Mike Minnix, Editor). This is the 36<sup>th</sup> volume in The Bible Notebook series. Volume V in the series from Acts is dedicated to Dr. Minnix, and the current volume to Dr. William R. Cooper.

Dr. Cooper sent me by E-Mail, his incredibly enlightening study, **OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH**. **He introduces one part of this study with the statement that the reader would read things in this paper he has never read before.** That, I thought, was a rather bold statement. Then I began reading and discovered things I had never read before! No professor in college or either seminary I attended ever mentioned a number of things of which Dr. Cooper wrote. One reason he is able to reveal some of these things is that he was able to research ancient records in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Old English, Middle English, Welch, Celt, and other languages. He did his own translations whenever it was necessary or expedient. **One of the most fascinating things of which he wrote had to do with Paul’s plans to visit Rome**, and this greetings to various believers in Rome. Some of this is reproduced in an earlier volume, but in the following paragraphs, Dr. Cooper writes about things I had never read before (and I don’t mind admitting it!):

### **Aristobulus**

“Aristobulus is a prime example of how the Bible can help us make better sense of otherwise mystifying secular records. The one appearance of his name in the Bible occurs in Romans 16:10 where Paul asks his readers to, “salute them which are of Aristobulus’ household.” Having directed his greetings to many others directly by name, it is intriguing that here Paul seems to be aware of the fact that Aristobulus himself is not at Rome, and would not be at Rome when his letter arrived (in AD 59/60) to be personally saluted. As we shall see in the next section concerning the

Lady Pomponia, **Paul was surprisingly well informed about what was happening in Rome**, for he sends similar greetings in the same epistle to the household of Narcissus who was also seemingly absent from his house. So, if Aristobulus was not at Rome when Paul wrote his letter in AD 59/60, then where was he? For the answer, we must look to the secular records (bold added by this writer).

“Writing in AD 190, Hippolytus harks back to Aristobulus as the bishop of the Britons, and **according to the Greek martyrologies, “[Aristobulus], one of the seventy disciples and a follower of St Paul the Apostle...was chosen by St Paul to be the missionary bishop to the land of Britain, inhabited by a very war-like and fierce race.** By them he was often scourged and repeatedly dragged as a criminal through their towns, yet he converted many of them to Christianity. He was martyred after he had built [churches?] and ordained deacons and priests for the island.”<sup>70</sup> This much from later Roman and Greek sources, who would not, we may assume, have had access to local British records. So what do the British records tell us? (Bold added by this writer.)

“The early Britons knew Aristobulus as *Arwystli Hen* - Old Aristobulus. A better translation, however, might be Aristobulus the Elder, this suffix denoting his office in the Church rather than his age. According to the records, he accompanied Bran, the father of Caradoc, to Britain where they preached the Gospel. But they did not travel alone: “These came with Bran the Blessed from Rome to Britain - *Arwystli Hen*, *Ilid*, *Cyndaw*, men of Israel, [and] *Maw* the son of *Arwystli*.”<sup>71</sup>

“Of interest is the fact that, according to the Greek Martyrology, Aristobolus was one of the original seventy disciples who were sent out by Jesus (Luke 10:1&17), and in the British records we see him accompanied on his later mission to Britain by other Jews (*Israeliait*- men of Israel) and well as his own son. Of those who accompanied him, *Ilid* (whose name may be the early Welsh form of Elias) seems to have left his mark by giving his name to the small Welsh town of *Llanilid* - lit. the Church or ‘sacred enclosure’ of *Ilid* - which lies between Cardiff and Bridgend, evidently commemorating his work in that part of the country. He is further remembered in an ancient British proverb, “Hast thou heard the saying of *Ilid*, one come of the race of Israel - ‘There is no mania like passion’?”<sup>72</sup>

“As for **Aristobulus himself, we read in other sources that he was slain in Britain during a mission to the Ordovician Welsh on the 15<sup>th</sup> March AD 59.**<sup>73</sup> **This would have been about the time that Paul was writing his letter to the Romans.** Supporting this information is the fact that a place in Montgomeryshire on the River Severn still bears the name of *Arwystli* as the place of his martyrdom, and it lies in an area once occupied by the Ordovices. Of great importance, however, is the consideration that without Paul’s remark in Romans 16:10, we could never have fully accounted for the appearance of this *Arwystli* in the British records” [Dr. William R.

Cooper, OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH, unpublished research paper, pp 27-28, bold added by this writer].

Luke records the history that proves Paul did go to Rome. Dr. Cooper tells us that Paul knew a lot about the church at Rome when he wrote to the church before going to Jerusalem. He also writes of things this writer had never read anywhere else!

Paul had been a faithful witness for Jesus in Jerusalem, and no matter what the enemy would do to prevent it, he was going to Rome. This was the fourth vision the Lord had given Paul (see also, 9:4-6; 16:9; 18:9-10). “The importance of this vision was not only in its comfort and encouragement (cf. 18:9-10) but also in the confirmation it gave of Paul’s plans to go to Rome. The gospel of Christ would literally go from Jerusalem to Rome by means of the Apostle Paul” [BKC].

Satan will do anything in his power, and the world will do anything in its power to hinder the Gospel, defeat Jesus Christ, and hinder or even kill His servants, but the more the world persecutes the church the more it grows. One of the great example of that is seen in China. One of the most inspiring reports I have heard was the report given by Ken Stephens, President of B & H Publishing (LifeWay Christian Resource) at one of our committee meetings when I was on the board of trustees and a member of the B & H Committee. Mr. Stephens reported on the work of the Broadman and Holman Outreach International ministry to publish the new Mandarin translation of the Bible and get it into the hands of believers in China. I was overjoyed the day he announced, “There are now more Christians (7%) in China than Communists (5%).” Communism is supposed to be a godless, classless, stateless society, but the more the persecute the church the more it grows. That might provide an answer for those who wonder what it would take for the church in America to experience revival.

**23:12 - A CONSPIRACY.** “*When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under a curse: neither to eat nor to drink until they had killed Paul.*” The city clerk in Ephesus had stated that the mob scene orchestrated by Demetrius the silversmith in Ephesus might well have gotten them all in trouble: “In fact, we run a risk of being charged with rioting for what happened today, since there is no justification that we can give as a reason for this disorderly gathering” (Acts 19:40). The hatred for Paul and for Jesus was so intense in Jerusalem that they risked the wrath of Rome when the mob had tried to kill him Paul on one day. Then, the next day there had been a such a violent scene in the meeting with the Sanhedrin that Claudius Lysias has been forced to rescue him. Now, under the pretext of defending God, the Jews formed a conspiracy and joined in a very strong oath that they would kill Paul.

**A CURSE.** These Jewish conspirators bound themselves together under some kind of curse that they would not “eat or drink until they had killed Paul.” The Greek verb for “taking an oath is *anathematizo*- (whence the Eng. “anathema”), which means a person binds himself under a curse if he does not fulfill his oath. Presumably these men were later released from this oath by lawyers because Paul’s circumstances changed through a dramatic series of events” [BKC]. Robertson adds:

“Deissmann (Light from the Ancient East, p. 95) quotes several examples of the verb in an Attic cursing tablet from Megara of the first or second century A.D. This proof shows that the word, as well as anathema (substantive) from which the verb is derived, was employed by pagans as well as by Jews. Deissmann suggests that Greek Jews like the seven sons of Sceva may have been the first to coin it. It occurs in the LXX as well as Mark 14:71 (which see and Luke 21:5); Acts 23:12, 14, 21. They placed themselves under an anathema or curse, devoted themselves to God (cf. Lev 27:28; 1Co 16:22)” [ATR].

**23:13 - MORE THAN 40.** *“There were more than 40 who had formed this plot.”* Those banding together in this conspiracy were not members of the Sanhedrin, nor did they include the chief priests and elders (see verse 14). Clark suggests that

“These forty Jews were no doubt of the class of the sicarii... (assassins,) a class of fierce zealots, who took justice into their own hand; and who thought they had a right to despatch all those who, according to their views, were not orthodox in their religious principles. If these were, in their bad way, conscientious men, must they not all perish through hunger, as God put it out of their power to accomplish their vow? No: for the doctrine of sacerdotal absolution was held among the Jews as among the Papists: hence it is said, in Hieros. Avodah Zarah, fol. 40: ‘He that hath made a vow not to eat any thing, wo to him, if he eat; and wo to him, if he do not eat. If he eat, he sinneth against his vow; and if he do not eat, he sinneth against his life.’ What must such a man do in this case? Let him go to the wise men, and they will loose him from his vow, as it is written, Proverbs 12:18: ‘The tongue of the wise is health.’ When vows were so easily dispensed with, they might be readily multiplied” [CLARKE].

Let’s see, 40 men placed themselves under a curse that would mean a slow, agonizing death if they failed to kill Paul, but there was an “escape clause” in the vow? Their hatred for Paul might well have been tempered by sense of self-preservation. “Presumably these men were later released from this oath by lawyers because Paul’s circumstances changed through a dramatic series of events” [BKC].

**23:14 - WENT TO THE CHIEF PRIESTS.** *“These men went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have bound ourselves under a solemn curse that we won’t eat anything until we have killed Paul.”* By “chief priests” Luke may have had in mind the Sanhedrin, but the next verse would suggest a select group within that body, which would include the high priest, the temple captain, treasurer, and possibly priests within the high priest’s family. Some have suggested that the chief priests would include anyone who had held the office of high priest before.

In the local church, certain issues are presented to deacons or some particular committee for their consideration and recommendations to the church. In the Southern Baptist Convention, each state

convention has an executive board to whom certain action is committed. A messenger to the annual convention makes a certain motion, and according to the bylaws of that convention, that motion is referred to the executive board. The “chief” officers of that board will then determine which committee should study the motion and then bring a recommendation at the plenary session, at which time the full executive board will vote either to recommend action to the messengers at the next convention, or state why no action should be taken (conflict with existing by-laws, for example).

I was a member of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources for a few years before I became a member of the executive committee. That is when I learned why certain things were recommended to the full board in a plenary session. For example, the President of LifeWay might ask the executive committee to recommend the creation of a new division to the full board, and if we agreed, we would decide on the wording and then our chairman would make that recommendation to the full board. These conspirators went to the “chief priests and elders” which may well have functioned like an executive committee, which would recommend action to the full Sanhedrin. These “chief priests were Sadducees. The Pharisees had already declared that Paul had done nothing worthy of death. The members of this conspiracy wanted Paul dead, and that conspiracy served the interests of the chief priests.

I suppose it is human nature to want to believe that when we accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord that He will deliver us from evil. In reality, when we commit ourselves to him we become a target both for Satan and the world. Satan will do everything within his power to keep an individual from believing in Jesus and being born from above. When that fails, he will then try to neutralize that individual’s witness, compromise his testimony, and in general, distract him from complete obedience to the Lord. There is nothing that serves Satan’s purpose more than placing a lost person within a church, unless it is getting a saved person to act like a lost person, or in general to conduct himself in a self-serving or divisive manner. There are people in power positions in the world who come into the church and try to lord it over others. There may be another individual who has never had any authority in the world, but when he comes into the church he discovers that he finally has a voice some institution or organization. He may face his responsibilities with humility and become an effective servant, or with such pride and arrogance that other members dread seeing him show up at a business meeting or committee meeting.

Jesus, rather than promising a life of comfort and joy, declared that “a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering service to God” (John 16:2). Jesus Himself was the victim of a conspiracy when Judas “went away and discussed with the chief priests and temple police how he could hand Him over to them” (Luke 22:4). After Paul had been saved on the road to Damascus, Jesus sent Ananias to him: “Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel. **I will certainly show him how much he must suffer for My name!**” (Acts 9:15-16). Any time you feel that you do not deserve the trials you face in this life, compare your situation with that of Paul

**23:15 -SO NOW.** *“So now you, along with the Sanhedrin, make a request to the commander that he bring him down to you as if you were going to investigate his case more thoroughly. However,*

*before he gets near, we are ready to kill him.*” Conspirators will have a plan of action when they begin to carry out an attack. A group of Islamic terrorists may conspire to attack a Jewish or Christian target, and then go to some cleric to coordinate attacks the target group. The conspiracy to attack the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on nine-eleven 2001, was carefully planned and executed.

Many Christians have gone into a business meeting, either in the local church or in a denominational meeting expecting to hear a motion on some subject, only to discover that a group within that body had conspired with each other, drawn up plans, and taken certain actions in order to get their way. A friend told me that many years ago, there was a pastor in south Mississippi who had served that church for many years before opposition arose from a small but determined group within the church.

While he was out of town for a revival, that group circulated a petition that the church ask the pastor to resign. This was neither the first nor last time such action has been taken against a pastor, and I might add, with no consideration for the welfare of the pastor or his family. When this pastor returned, some of the people behind that conspiracy handed him the petition which stated that they no longer wanted him to be their pastor. The following Sunday, the pastor called a special business meeting. When the time came for the special business meeting, the pastor stood up and announced, “I have a list of people here who no longer want me to be their pastor. Is there a motion that we grant them their letters and let them seek a pastor who pleases them?” The motion was made, there was a second, and the surprised conspirators were no longer members of that church! That was an unusual situation. Sadly, many who have professed to support their pastor do so only so long as it is popular with the majority. Not all controversies are handled that peacefully. As various Christian sects focused on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, violence erupted, according to a December 27, 2007, report by the BBC:

### **BBC News, Dec. 27, 2007**

#### **Catholic and Orthodox clerics have exchanged blows inside Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of Christianity's holiest sites.**

The punch-up began after Greek and Russian Orthodox believers took offence at a door left open by members of the Franciscan order during a service.

At least five people were injured in the fracas - including Israeli police officers called in to quell it. The church is shared jealously by six rival Christian sects.

#### **Long-time antipathy**

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's Old City is said to be the site of both the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The latest trouble began after a procession through the church on Holy Cross Day - marking the discovery of the cross which some believe was used

for the crucifixion.

"There was lots of hitting going on. Police were hit, monks were hit ... there were people with bloodied faces," said Aviad Sar Shalom, an Israeli tour guide who witnessed the fight, according to Reuters news agency.

Police said they made several arrests.

The six Christian sects sharing the church have come to blows before.

In 2002, monks from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church of Egypt - two groups which for years have been vying for control of the church's roof - fought over the position of a chair on the roof.

Rivalry between the six different churches dates back to the aftermath of the crusades and to the great schism between Eastern and Western Christianity in the 11th Century.

To prevent squabbling, two Muslim families have had guardianship of the key to the only entrance to the church since 1178 when they were entrusted with it by the Muslim ruler Salah el-Din (Saladin).

**In the name of the Prince of Peace these religious leaders attacked each other in what the BBC calls a "punch-up" (which must something short of the Old West "knock down, drag out"). Not only did they attack each other, the riot had to be controlled by Jewish police.**

Think of the twisted irony of that scene!

**MAKE A REQUEST.** The conspirators have a plan and that plan means that they must enlist the chief priests, and then the chief priests must expand the conspiracy to include the entire Sanhedrin. Those who profess to serve the Lord in His holy temple must enter into their conspiracy if it is to be a success. These assassins are now recruiting the entire Sanhedrin in their plot. They are deadly serious, and dangerously committed: "make a request to the commander that he bring him down to you as if you were going to investigate his case more thoroughly." No doubt, they were convinced, Claudius Lysias would grant this request. It was a way out for him. They continued, "However, before he gets near, we are ready to kill him."

This was a bold and dangerous plan. If they had attacked Paul and killed him while he was in the custody of Roman soldiers, the consequences for Israel might have been horrendous. They had already rioted in the temple complex when they tried to kill Paul, and the fact that there had been no reprisals may well have encouraged these conspirators to believe they could get away with this brutal murder. Did these conspirators plan to kill the Roman escort? Were they prepared to sacrifice their own lives in order to kill Paul? We have seen Muslim terrorists recruit suicide bombers to blow themselves up in order to kill Jews or Muslims of a different "sect", but there is no reason to assume

this was a suicide mission. Their purpose was to kill Paul, but there was a risk involved for them. **23:16 - THE SON OF PAUL'S SISTER.** *“But the son of Paul's sister, hearing about their ambush, came and entered the barracks and reported it to Paul.”* This is the first mention of Paul's sister or her family. We are not told that he had family living in Jerusalem until now. I have always assumed that Paul's sister lived in Jerusalem, but one writer offers the suggestion that “He was probably a student in Jerusalem and may have heard from someone at school of the plan to kill Paul” [NCWB]. In which case, Paul's sister may have still lived in Tarsus, but Luke does not provide that information.

A reasonable question is how the young man learned of the conspiracy. If he had been a student in a school for young Pharisee students, as Paul had been, he may have heard of the conspiracy, but that assumes that Paul's nephew was not a believer. While looking at these verses, an idea came to me that I had never considered before. Suppose a member of the sect of the Pharisees who was a member of the Sanhedrin “leaked” the information to the young man with the suggestion that he go to Paul and reveal the conspiracy to him. If some of the Pharisees had been shocked by this murderous plan, and had feared reprisals, they may well have devised a plan, not only to save Paul, but to save the Sanhedrin, and the nation of Israel. If this seems far-fetched, remember that only one decade later they would provoke Rome one time too many and Titus would be placing Jerusalem under siege. Before too long, in A. D. 70, this magnificent temple would be destroyed, just as Jesus had prophesied.

“As some were talking about the temple complex, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, He said, 6 “These things that you see—the days will come when not one stone will be left on another that will not be thrown down!” (Luke 21:5-6).

NOTE: After reflecting on my speculation about Paul's Nephew and how he learned of the plot, I decided to contact Dr. Gene Jeffries, president of Cambridge Graduate School, and Dr. William R. Cooper, noted New Testament scholar, translator, and author and ask them if they thought my reasoning had any merit. In our correspondence, I restated my supposition in this way:

I went back and checked and found that The Bible Knowledge Commentary asks some of the questions I asked (adding the question as to whether or not he was a Christian, which occurred to me, but I quite naturally forgot it!). That commentary adds:

“The nephew was a **young man** (vv. 17-19, 22). This Greek word *neanias*, used in verse 17, was earlier used of Paul (7:58) and Eutychus (20:9). It may refer to a man in his twenties or thirties. (*Neaniskos*, a synonym of *neanios*, is used in 23:18 and 22. In v. 19 the niv has “young man” but the Gr. does not.) When the fortress **commander** heard of this plan, he **cautioned** Paul's nephew not to **tell anyone** he had **reported this** [BKC].

A. T. Robertson writes:

“How old the young man (neanias) was we do not know, but it is the very word used of Paul in Acts 7:58 when he helped in the killing of Stephen, **a young man in the twenties probably**. See also Acts 20:9 of Eutychus. He is termed neaniskos in verse Acts 23:22. Asked him privately (kat' idian epunthaneto). Imperfect middle, began to ask (inchoative) [ATR, bold added by this writer].

My reasoning is that if Paul's nephew had been a young boy he may well have picked up the information on the street - but only if those 40 + conspirators had been stupid enough to discuss it in public!

If he had been a student (of some Pharisee like his uncle?), a Pharisee what who was a member of the Sanhedrin, one who had cried out that Paul had done nothing worthy of death, might well have secretly gone to the young man and revealed the plot and then told him to report it to Paul.

Dr. Cooper responded:

“One possibility is that the warning might have been passed to Paul's nephew - and he's the one you'll need to ask about this when you see him - not by a Pharisee who necessarily sympathized with Paul, or who was a secret disciple (and there were many of those), but one who was aware that Paul was a Roman citizen. This citizenship was no secret amongst the Pharisees or those who had worked with Saul in the pre-Damascus days, and the dangers of lying in wait to murder a Roman citizen lay in the fact that it was tantamount to treason - even an act of war for a non-Roman. If the fact that they had come so close to giving Paul a whopping with a hickory switch - I paraphrase here - had filled the state-employed soldiers with so much dread once they realised that he was a Roman citizen, then think how the fear of murdering him would have played upon the mind of a wiser and more thoughtful Pharisee. The consequences would have been immense and dire. Paul's citizenship, once invoked in the court of law, was sufficient to entirely up-end the judicial process brought against him, and required the Roman governor - at great expense and inconvenience to the state in both money and manpower - to send him on to Rome. We tend to overlook this aspect, but the mere fact that Paul was a Roman citizen was a powerful argument for any astute man against murdering him. In his role(s) both before and after Damascus, Paul was hardly a private man, and his citizenship would have been known about by many, though overlooked now perhaps in the heat of the present moment” (Bill Cooper, E-mail message, Dec. 24, 2007).

Dr. Gene Jeffries wrote:

“You pose some of the most interesting questions...

“I have often mused upon the boy myself, but never to the extent you mention. No one can know for sure, of course, but you know how kids are everywhere in Israel. It would not surprise me if he were mingling among some of the conspirators and heard (providentially) what we know now from the Scriptures. It might also be that one of his friends overheard the conversation and related it to him. In any event, your guess is as good as anyone’s. No one can successfully refute a supposition. Wish I knew more to say” (On Christmas Day, he added: “Acts 23:16 speaks of Paul’s nephew as *huios*, a “mature son.” That sort of stirs the mix, doesn’t it?) [Gene Jeffries, E-mail message, Dec. 24, 2007].

I might add that Dr. Cooper’s suggestion that the fear that an attack on a Roman citizen might have motivated a reasonable Pharisee to reveal the plot to Paul’s nephew. Dr. Jeffries’ translation of *huios* as a “mature son” compliments A. T. Robertson’s suggestion that Paul’s nephew may well have been in his twenties.

**REPORTED TO PAUL.** The young man “came and entered the barracks and reported it to Paul.” It may have taken a family member gain permission to visit a prisoner.

**23:17 - THEN PAUL.** “*Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, ‘Take this young man to the commander, because he has something to report to him.’*” We know the Lord was watching over Paul because He had appeared to him and assured him he was going to Rome, “but he assumed the responsibility of protecting his own life for the work that God still had for him to do (see 27:22-25, 31)” [NCWB].

This is the thirty-sixth verse by verse study I have done from the Scripture, most of them from the New Testament. On numerous occasions, when preaching, writing, or teaching, I have quoted Bible scholars on the subject of the Roman centurion. As I was working on these verses very early on Christmas Eve, 2007, it occurred to me to go to a totally different source, so I sent a message to a man to whom all Americans owe a serious debt of gratitude. General Dutch Shoffner (Retired three star) commanded everything the U. S. Army had in Europe for some time during the Cold War. He keeps up to speed for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that two sons, LTC Andy Shoffner and LTC Allen Shoffner, are serving our country today, risking their lives to protect us.

I wrote:

“Dutch, I am working on Acts 23:17-18. I have often thought that the army sergeant today is a close parallel to the Roman centurion. After our communication in the past, I have expanded my thinking to include the kind of training the Roman army provided its centurions. They are often presented in the Bible in a positive light.

“First, am I right in drawing this parallel? Second, would they not have provided training for their centurions that went beyond sword fighting ...?”

General Shoffner replied:

“Pretty close, but a little refinement would make it more precise.

“Serving with the Turkish Army was interesting in that the names for their leaders essentially followed parallels with the Roman Army.

“A squad leader, in charge of 10 men was named *On Ba\_si* [literally 10 heads]

“A captain, in charge of 100 men was called *Yuz Ba\_si* [literally 100 heads]

“A major, the first field grade level, was called *Bin Ba\_si* [literally 1000 heads]

“Their Sergeants were called *Ba\_s Çavu\_s* [i.e. Head Sergeant]

“The Centurions command nominally 100 men, given that they would be closer to the rank of Captain rather than Sergeants. I am not sure of the role of Sergeants in the Roman Army. Most Western Armies structure has the sergeant as the technical expert on the weapons systems and the officer the tactical leader. The sergeant ensures that the **how to do** is performed well {technical aspects of fighting} and the commissioned officer is the **what, where, when and why** [the tactical aspects of fighting]

“Given the responsibility of a Centurion, I would compare it more closely with our Company Commanders of today. Originally the Centurions commanded 100, then subsequent revisions went to 80 and then to 60 men, although the title never changed. Today’s infantry companies will contain 4 or 5, 10 man squads, with some headquarters element so that the strength is close to 60. The battalion commander, a Lieutenant Colonel, will command some 5 companies or about 300 men [but different battalions will have different numbers and some companies are even larger than some battalions; e.g., Allen commanded the Headquarters Company of the 82d Division as a captain and it had 500 soldiers in the company.]” (General Dutch Shoffner, Retired, Dec. 24, 2007).

The centurion may well have refused Paul’s request, but he did not. He is serving the Lord’s purpose without realizing it. Bible students have often observed that most Roman centurions mentioned in the Bible are seen in a positive light, men of reasonable wisdom, predisposed to justice. More to the point here, Paul took action to protect himself:

“Though St. Paul had the most positive assurance from Divine authority that he should be preserved, yet he knew that the Divine providence acts by reasonable and prudent means; and that, if he neglected to use the means in his power, he could not expect God's providence to work in his behalf. He who will not help himself, according to the means and power he possesses, has neither reason nor revelation to assure him that he shall receive any assistance from God” [CLARKE].

I recall that when I was a very young man in the ministry I heard a few people use the expression, “What is to be will be.” I suppose this was a sort of blind pre-determinism, or blind pre-destination. I was often blessed with teachers who encouraged me to evaluate statements like that. I was told that there were a few people around who actually reasoned that “if you step out in front of a car on the highway, and it is not your time, God will intervene and you will be saved.” My first thought was that they were saying if you do something stupid, the Lord will cause the driver of that car to have a wreck and possibly be killed to save you? I think I made the statement that if you step out in front of a car on the highway, the Lord might decide that you have moved up “your time”!

**23:18 - TO THE COMMANDER.** *“So he took him, brought him to the commander, and said, ‘The prisoner Paul called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, because he has something to tell you.’”* The centurion took the young man to see the commander, Claudius Lysias and told him that Paul had asked him to take the young man to him because he had something to report to him. This centurion is acting in the best interest of the prisoner, the commander, and the troops. He also shows a maturity and respect for a prisoner that may reflect positively on the training the Roman army gave its centurions. Luke has identified this young man as Paul’s sister’s son, and the Greek word *neanias* was, “used in verse 17, was earlier used of Paul (7:58) and Eutychus (20:9). It may refer to a man in his twenties or thirties. (*Neaniskos*, a synonym of *neanios*, is used in 23:18 and 22. In v. 19 the NIV has “young man” but the Gr. does not)” [BKC].

**23:19 - TOOK HIM BY THE HAND.** *“Then the commander took him by the hand, led him aside, and inquired privately, ‘What is it you have to report to me?’”* The commander “took him by the hand”, or in the vernacular of our day, he took him aside. If Paul’s nephew had been a child, one might expect a kind officer to take him by the hand, but it is doubtful that a child would have been in this position. He may well have been in his twenties. Paul was a young man (Acts 7:58) when he approved the killing of Stephen. This probably means that the commander drew him aside so that he could hear him privately. He might have arrogantly demanded that he “spit it out!” in front of the troops, which might have humiliated the young man.

Luke presents both the centurion and the commander in a positive light. There is no doubt that many officers were abusive in their treatment of prisoners. Some may well have been bigots who loathed those of another race. We might remember that the Jews were not the most willing subjects, and many of them hated all Gentiles, and all of them hated the sight of Roman soldiers in Jerusalem and Judea. Claudius Lysias had told Paul (Ch. 22) that he had paid a great price for his Roman citizenship, so he may have been more favorably disposed toward a conquered people than a native born Roman. He is certainly looking out for the best interest of Rome, but like the centurion Peter

introduced to the Lord in Caesarea, this officer seems to be more than fair in dealing with the Jews.

**23:20 - THE JEWS.** *“The Jews,” he said, ‘have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin tomorrow, as though they are going to hold a somewhat more careful inquiry about him.”* Since Paul’s nephew was a Jew, one may be surprised that the young man would have said, “the Jews” rather than saying that a group of assassins had formed a conspiracy. The young man speaks “As if the whole nation was in the conspiracy and so in verse Acts 23:12. The conspirators may have belonged to the Zealots, but clearly they represented the state of Jewish feeling toward Paul in Jerusalem” [ATR].

The young man went on to provide the specifics of the conspiracy. It is important to observe that **he knew the specifics**, not simply some rumor that there was “something in the air” about a plot. My thoughts here may be more eisegetical (reading my thoughts into the passage) than exegetical (taking information out from the passage), but **I continue to wonder how the young man learned of the conspiracy.** Was it an accident, or is it possible that when the assassins went to the Sanhedrin with their plot, one of the members, possibly a Pharisee who had already declared that Paul had done nothing deserving of death, may have sought out this young man and revealed the plot to him? I have no basis for that at all, but it would be interesting to me to know that. The young man may have learned of the plot accidentally, but someone who knew of the plot and feared the repercussions, had they been successful, may have sought him out to protect the temple and to protect the people.

We certainly seem justified if we infer that the religious leaders of Judaism, the Chosen People, the People of the Covenant, were more than just sympathetic with the would be assassins. The would be assassins had gone to the Sanhedrin, or at least to their leaders, to persuade them to send a request to the commander to bring Paul back to another meeting of that body. It seems that they were perfectly willing to help set Paul up for the ambush; such was their hatred for Jesus, and such was their hatred for followers of Jesus. Surely, at some point Jews should have ceased their animosity against Jesus and His church, right? Sadly, that is not the case; it is not uncommon for Jews to charge Christians with anti-Semitism.

The late Dr. Leo Eddleman told a story that illustrates the point, but before relating that story, a brief introduction to Dr. Eddleman would be in order. Writes David Smith, (“Baptists in the Holy Land, Mar. 11, 2007):

“During the 1930s a number of American Southern Baptists arrived in the Holy Land to bolster the local work. **They included Leo Eddleman, later a college Hebrew professor, who was noted for his mastery of both Hebrew and Arabic.** He attributed those skills to the curfew maintained during the British Mandate, saying there was little else to do but study from sunrise to sunset (emphasis added).

As related in another volume, Dr. Eddleman was preaching when a tall young Israeli man stood up and challenged him: “Why have you come over here to preach about Christ to us when Christians

have been behind all the wars against Christians?” When Dr. Eddleman asked for an explanation, the man declared that Hitler was a Christian, Mussolini was a Christian, and Stalin was a Christian. Sadly, this man had been taught that Christians had been guilty of these atrocities. It should be stressed that when anyone who identifies himself as a Christian commits such atrocities they do so in absolute disobedience to Jesus Christ (see the Sermon on the Mount).

There are many Jewish people who are very friendly with Christians, but how do the people in Israel feel about Christians today? First, it should be stressed that a Christian is normally safe in Israel, while in many other places in the Middle East, there is danger for any American. With that in mind I will now share a personal note from a friend who listens to Israeli radio stations on a regular basis:

“I get quite downhearted when I hear on Israeli radio what lengths the Jews will go to in their rejection of our Lord. I listened to one last night...who referred to the Nazi propaganda publication, *Der Sturmer*, as a Christian newspaper. But I'm sure in my heart that they know the truth of it, yet use such 'examples' to hold up their fig leaf theology. It hurts me to say it, but woe unto them.”

What should our response be? We must remember Paul's burden for his people even when he was the victim of their hatred, and we must pray as Paul did for Israel.

**MORE CAREFUL INQUIRY.** Did they think the commander would buy this reason? Possibly. However, they had totally blown it when they had convened to hear Paul before this. Claudius Lysias had to send in his troops to rescue Paul from them. They may believe they can persuade him that they will give Paul a more careful, and orderly hearing if he will bring him to the Sanhedrin again.

**23:21 - DON'T LET THEM.** *“Don't let them persuade you, because there are more than 40 of them arranging to ambush him, men who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they kill him. Now they are ready, waiting for a commitment from you.”* Paul's nephew urges the commander not to let them persuade him. Robertson notes that the verb is the: “First aorist passive subjunctive of *peithô*, common verb, here to be persuaded by, to listen to, to obey, to yield to. With negative and rightly. Do not yield to them (dative) at all” [ATR].

**AMBUSH HIM.** This is no small plot to be taken lightly. More than 40 men were planning to “ambush” Paul on the way to the Sanhedrin. This was a bold plot by men who were willing to risk their lives to kill Paul and silence his witness for Jesus of Nazareth. Such action might lead to a wholesale insurrection, but more than likely, it would have led to a wholesale slaughter of Jews by the Roman troops stationed there. We can be sure that if there had been a major uprising, there would have been an invasion by the most powerful army the world had ever known. These Jews would discover the horror of such an invasion a decade later, when Roman troops under Titus marched against Jerusalem.

**NOW THEY ARE READY.** Everything was in place. More than 40 men had entered the conspiracy under the most solemn vow that they would neither eat nor drink until they killed Paul. They must have been convinced that they could persuade Claudius Lysias to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin immediately upon their request. They could not go long without water.

**23:22 - THE COMMANDER.** *“So the commander dismissed the young man and instructed him, ‘Don’t tell anyone that you have informed me about this.’”* To his credit, the commander took the young man’s warning seriously, and acted quickly. First of all, he instructed the young man not to tell anyone he had informed him about the conspiracy.

## Flight By Night

**23:23 - HE SUMMONED.** *“He summoned two of his centurions and said, “Get 200 soldiers ready with 70 cavalry and 200 spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight.”* The centurion listened to Paul’s nephew carefully and then took immediate action. The first thought was to get Paul out of Jerusalem as quickly as possible. He sent for two centurions and ordered them to get 200 soldiers ready (each centurion commanded 100 soldiers), along with 70 calvary and 200 spearmen. We can be sure that there were enough soldiers left in Jerusalem to maintain order after they slipped Paul out of town.

He would slip Paul out of town at nine that night under the protection of 470 men, including the 70 mounted calvary men (horsemen, NASB). This must have been an awesome sight, and we can be sure there were people around who saw them leave the city. The commander would leave any decision in the hands of the centurions, but they would be prepared to take either defensive or offensive action as circumstances demanded.

**CAESAREA.** By sending Paul to Caesarea, the commander accomplished two things immediately: (1) he removed him from Jerusalem where the conspirators were waiting to carry out a plot that might have led a major insurrection; (2) it would put Paul in a much safer environment (Caesarea being a more secure place for him); and (3) The governor’s office was there.

**NINE TONIGHT.** “For the third time(!) Paul left a city surreptitiously, at night (cf. Damascus, 9:25; Thessalonica, 17:10).” [BKC].

**23:24 - PROVIDE MOUNTS.** *“Also provide mounts so they can put Paul on them and bring him safely to Felix the governor.”* Robertson notes that the commander changes “from direct to indirect discourse just the opposite of that in verse Acts 23:22” (where he orders Paul’s nephew not to tell anyone what he has reported the plot. The commander is both thorough and practical in ordering mounts for Paul and the soldier or soldiers to whom he is chained. There would be 200 soldiers, 200 spearmen, and 70 mounted calvary men assigned to take Paul safely to Felix, the Roman governor for the province. The question that is not answered here is whether or not horses were ordered for

the foot soldiers and spearmen, or only for Paul and those soldiers to whom he was chained, in which case there would have been quite a commotion in getting this troop ready to get on the road. However, there would have been enough activity to attract a lot of attention if 400 foot soldiers were assembled and then ordered to march through the streets of Jerusalem at nine o'clock at night.

The KJV has "beasts" whereas the HCSB and NASB have "mounts". Robertson states these would have been "asses or horses, but not war-horses" [ATR], though he does not justify that statement. He is only speculating. They would have also have needed packhorses for their gear. It was about seventy miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea, not an impossible ride for calvary in one day, but a very demanding one by night. They may have been able to change horses at Antipatris, but no mention is made of that. It was a 40 mile forced march at night from Jerusalem to Antipatris, but the situation was urgent and the danger great. There were many spots for an ambush, had the assassins been give time to overtake them or to get ahead of them.

Since there would have been a lot of activity associated with the assembling of men, horses, and provisions, if the would be assassins had been alerted to what was taking place they may have had time to take some action, assuming they knew associated the activity with Paul, and assuming they knew the route they would take. In this case the route may not have been so hard to guess. They were descending down a mountainous road, which was much more tiring than marching on a level highway, so they would have needed food and the horses would have needed food, water, and rest before Paul and the calvary continued the trip to Caesarea. The 400 soldiers turned back at Antipatris.

**23:25 - A LETTER.** *"He wrote a letter of this kind..."* Claudius Lysias may be moving quickly but he is very thorough. Clarke is of the opinion that "that **this was not only the substance of the letter, but the letter itself: the whole of it is so perfectly formal as to prove this;** and in this simple manner are all the letters of the ancients formed. **In this also we have an additional proof of St. Luke's accuracy**" [CLARKE, bold added by this writer]. Clarke refers to the letter as "an additional proof", and though his conjecture seems logical it is certainly not absolute proof. However, it certainly affirms all the other evidence of Luke's accuracy.

**23:26 - CLAUDIUS LYSIAS.** *"Claudius Lysias, To the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings."* The commander had told Paul that he had purchased his Roman citizenship at great cost, so this means that he took the Roman name Claudius "at the time of his citizenship" [NCWB]. Lysias was his Greek name.

**GOVERNOR FELIX.** While I was a student at Mississippi College I began preaching from this chapter, to prisoners in the Hinds County Jail in Jackson, Mississippi, and at various camps at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, as well as in local churches. The primary focus was Paul's testimony before Felix, but I was careful to summarize the events that led up to his defense before the governor. During that time I relied on a textbook I used in an intensive in Acts, as well as notes from professor E. L. Douglas and others. My sources were limited, but I found Felix to be an interesting character. Sources are still limited, but Felix remains interesting. We know he was

governor of Judea from A. D. 52 to 59 (see 24:24, 25) [NCWB]. Robertson's summary is just that, but it still informative. He agrees with Clarke that

“there is no reason for thinking that it is not a genuine copy since the letter may have been read in open court before Felix, and Luke was probably with Paul. The Roman law required that a subordinate officer like Lysias in reporting a case to his superior should send a written statement of the case and it was termed *elogium*. **A copy of the letter may have been given Paul after his appeal to Caesar.** It was probably written in Latin. The letter is a **"dexterous mixture of truth and falsehood"** (Furneaux) with the stamp of genuineness. It puts things in a favourable light for Lysias and makes no mention of his order to scourge Paul” [ATR, bold added by this writer].

Claudius is accountable to Felix, the Roman governor, so he glosses over the fact that he had made no effort to establish Paul's identity, nor does he mention the fact that he had ordered a Roman citizen scourged without making any effort to determine whether or not he was in fact a Roman citizen. The modern reader might well condemn Claudius Lysias, but in his shoes we might have done the same thing. One would be reluctant to mention the early errors, and move on to all the things he did right. Both Claudius Lysias nor Governor Felix were experienced in dealing with the Jews, but little could they appreciate the spiritual state of the nation that was still God's Chosen People. Bible students are often critical of characters of whom we have but limited information. For example, we may marvel that Israel would continually rebel against God follow pagan gods, but America is in the process of doing that very thing today. According to a Dec. 24, 2007, Gallup Poll,

“About 82% of Americans in 2007 told Gallup interviewers that they identified with a Christian religion. **That includes 51% who said they were Protestant,** 5% who were "other Christian," 23% Roman Catholic, and 3% who named another Christian faith, including 2% Mormon.”

The Gallup Poll report continued:

“Because 11% said they had no religious identity at all, and another 2% didn't answer, these results suggest that well more than 9 out of 10 Americans who identify with a religion are Christian in one way or the other.

**“Has this changed over time?”**

“Yes. The percentage of Americans who identify with a Christian religion is down some over the decades. This is not so much because Americans have shifted to other religions, but because a significantly higher percentage of Americans today say they don't have a religious identity. In the late 1940s, when Gallup began summarizing these data, a very small percentage explicitly told interviewers they did not identify with any religion. But of those

who did have a religion, Gallup classified -- **in 1948, for example -- 69% as Protestant** and 22% as Roman Catholic, or about 91% Christian” [Frank Newport, “Religious and social trends in America, Gallup Poll report, Dec 24, 2007, bold added by this writer].

The nation, according to this Gallup Poll report, is 82% Christians, but we are losing this country to secularists, humanists, pagans, Islamists, and cults. Jesus was not deceived in His day and He is not deceived today. Sadly, only a small percent of the 82% have any idea what it means to be a Bible believing Christian. We gloss over Governor Mitt Romney’s Mormonism, insisting that it is simply another Christian denomination, when any reporter worth his salt can do the research that exposes that as a lie. It is interesting that in the race for president, the media loved former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee as long as he stood not chance at all in their minds, but as soon as he moved to the head of the pack in Iowa, the same people who were defending Romney’s Mormon “faith” were attacking Mike Huckabee because he believed in the biblical account of creation, even though interpretation of the Genesis account is somewhat moderate.

Sadly, many of those who were included in this latest Gallup Poll who profess to be Christians look at Christianity through rose colored glasses. They want a heaven without a hell, pleasure without pain, action without consequences, faith without tests, and identification without participation, and above all, tolerance. The worst sin is to condemn behavior as sinful or people as sinners.

**23:27 - SEIZED BY THE JEWS.** *“When this man had been seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them, I arrived with my troops and rescued him because I learned that he is a Roman citizen.”* The commander summarizes the events leading up to his order to take Paul to Caesarea. The Jews did seize Paul, but he glosses over the fact that the temple complex was a mob scene, and when they took him out side the temple complex and locked the gates, there was a major riot in the street. He did rescue Paul from the mob, but he does not mention that he took him into custody and ordered him scourged without any effort to determine whether or not he was a Roman citizen. The NASB renders this: “When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, **having learned that he was a Roman.**” (Bold added). The HCSB has, “because I learned that he is a Roman citizen.” He clearly states that he “rescued” Paul from the Jewish mob upon learning that he was a Roman citizen, when in fact he did not learn that fact until after he had ordered him scourged. In his place, and without Christian ethics, we might have done the same thing. In fact, it would be interesting to know how many reports are written up like that today. Hidden cameras, dash cameras in police cars, and video features in modern cell phone technology have begun to impact police reports. Honest officers welcome those pictures and movie clips and use them themselves.

**23:28 - WANTING TO KNOW.** *“Wanting to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down before their Sanhedrin.”* Claudius Lysias gets the basics right, but omits the facts that would have reflected negatively on him. He did not include the fact that he had assumed that Paul was an Egyptian insurrectionist (21:38), that he did not believe him after he

offered proof that he was not an Egyptian, nor the fact that he had ordered Paul scourged without determining that he was a Roman citizen. He is reporting as many commanders have reported throughout history. Some provide more information than others, and some are more honest than others.

**THE SANHEDRIN.** When he mentioned taking Paul before the Sanhedrin, he knew that Felix would understand that he had tried to ascertain the facts and appease the Jews. Anything less and Felix would have been reading letters from the chief priests about how he had neglected Roman law. Interestingly, the commander does not mention the fact that a riot broke out between the Sadducees and Pharisees on the meeting of the Sanhedrin.

**23:29 - I FOUND OUT.** *“I found out that the accusations were about disputed matters in their law, and that there was no charge that merited death or chains.”* Claudius Lysias continues his report, pointing out that the issue concerned Jewish law, and that there was no charge that merited “death or chains”. Bible students recognize that the “importance of this document is seen in 23:29 where the commander declared Paul to be innocent. Compare similar comments by Gallio (18:14-15), the city executive of Ephesus (19:40), Pharisees (23:9), Festus (25:25), and Herod Agrippa II (26:31-32)” [BKC].

Some students of the Word suggest that Paul was still in chains, possibly chained to two soldiers during the march from Jerusalem to Caesarea. It is possible that he was released from chains while he was riding the horse on the night flight to Antipatris, and one to Caesarea (after the foot soldiers left them to return to Jerusalem. A good question here is why he might have been in chains at all if the commander had determined that he had done nothing worthy of chains. Obviously, Felix would have the final word on that.

**23:30 - THE PLOT.** *“When I was informed that there was a plot against the man, I sent him to you right away. I also ordered his accusers to state their case against him in your presence.”* Commander Claudius Lysias states the basic facts. He learned of the plot to ambush Paul while he was under the protection of Roman soldiers, so he sent Paul to Felix and “ordered his accusers” to go to Caesarea and “state their case against him in your presence.” The commander clearly wanted to get Paul away from the would be assassins, but he also wanted to place the responsibility for deciding the case in the hands of the governor.

NOTE: The letter from Claudius Lysias ends here. Luke will continue his report from this point. Though the Scripture does not state that fact. Luke obviously joined Paul in Caesarea as soon as possible and he would have heard the details directly from Paul. Above all, we must remember that Luke is writing this historical account under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

**23:31 - TO ANTIPATRIS.** *“Therefore, during the night, the soldiers took Paul and brought him to Antipatris as they were ordered.”* Luke continues his account here. It was Some 40 miles to Antipatris, so they would have traveled through the night to reach that point. Antipatris was founded by Herod the Great and it was on the road from Jerusalem to Caesarea. It was a hard night’s ride,

even if the foot soldiers had been mounted.

**23:32 - THE NEXT DAY.** *“The next day, they returned to the barracks, allowing the cavalry to go on with him.”* The next day, probably after a brief rest and a meal, the 200 soldiers and the 200 spearmen turned back, leaving the 70 calvary men (23:23) to continue on the trip to Caesarea with their prisoner. After the hard, overnight ride to Antipatris, Paul would be out of immediate danger. They would make more progress on the second leg of the journey, without the obvious problems associated with a hard ride on a steep road in the dark.

**23:33 - DELIVERED THE LETTER.** *“When these men entered Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.”* “These men” were the 70 calvary men, including (or in addition to) their officers. They would have been anxious to deliver the prisoner and the letter to the governor as quickly as possible. They had to be tired, hungry, and thirsty after their forced nighttime march from Jerusalem to Antipatris, with only a brief break before continuing their trip to Caesarea. They had the support of 400 foot soldiers on the first leg of the journey, part of which way the road was steep, winding through ideal places for an ambush.

It is interesting that Claudius Lysias wrote that he had “rescued” Paul from the Jewish mob, but he arrives in Caesarea as a prisoner. He would, for the next two years, be a prisoner of Rome and of Felix, the Governor. One wonders how long it would take for the word of his imprisonment to reach Philip, and his daughters. Luke may have gone directly to them. There is no doubt that the message that Paul was a prisoner would have called to mind the prophecy of Agabus only a few days earlier.

**23:34 - AFTER HE READ IT.** *“After he read it, he asked what province he was from. So when he learned he was from Cilicia...”* Felix read the report from Claudius Lysias, which gave him the basic information he needed until the commander came down from Jerusalem. There would be an official hearing at that time.

**WHAT PROVINCE.** Of all the things Felix might ask, this seems among the most unexpected to the modern reader, but it is exactly what those present would expect. The governor wanted to know of what province he was from, probably so he would know whether it was senatorial or imperial. “Cilicia, like Judea, was under the control of the propraetor of Syria (imperial province). Paul’s arrest was in Jerusalem and so under the jurisdiction of Felix unless it was a matter of insurrection when he could appeal to the propraetor of Syria” [ATR].

**HE WAS FROM CILICIA.** When he gave his testimony in Jerusalem, “Paul said, ‘I am a Jewish man from Tarsus of Cilicia, a citizen of an important city’” (Acts 21:39). He was a native of Tarsus, and had spent several years working and ministering in Cilicia before Barnabas found him and asked him to join him as his assistant in Antioch of Syria. Barnes notes that Felix

“knew from the letter of Lysias that he was a Roman, but he was not informed of what place or province he was. This he doubtless did in order to ascertain whether he properly belonged to his jurisdiction. Roman provinces were districts of country

which were entrusted to the jurisdiction of procurators. How far the jurisdiction of Felix extended is not certainly known. It appears, however, that it included Cilicia” [BARNES].

**23:35 - A HEARING.** *“(H)e said, “I will give you a hearing whenever your accusers get here too.” And he ordered that he be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.”* Felix, after reading the report from Claudius Lysias, and after determining that he had jurisdiction, announced that he would the case when the accusers arrived in Caesarea. That the commander would come to Caesarea to deal with this case is to be expected, but it seems that Felix assumed that the Jewish leaders would also come to make charges in his court.

Some have observed that Felix was acting prudently when he refused to hold a hearing until Paul’s accusers arrived from Jerusalem. I have challenged commonly held positions more than once in this chapter, so it should not be too surprising that I would do it again here. On the surface, it seems that Felix is indeed acting prudently. It would seem that way when Claudius Lysias and leading Jewish leaders from Jerusalem to bring charges against Paul. Then, Luke informs us that rather than releasing Paul he held him and sent for him often in order to give him and opportunity to offer the governor a bribe (ch. 24). For that reason I would question the claim that Felix was acting prudently. I would suggest that he was simply covering all bases. All the reports to Rome would protect Felix. When he learned that Paul was a Roman citizens, I would suggest that the wheels of graft and corruption began to turn in his mind.

**IN HEROD’S PALACE.** Felix ordered Paul be “kept under guard in Herod’s palace.” Adam Clarke writes that it was called Herod’s praetorium “because it was built by Herod the Great. The praetorium was the place where the Roman praetor had his residence; and it is probable that, in or near this place, there was a sort of guard room, where state prisoners were kept. Paul was lodged here till his accusers should arrive” [CLARKE].

## CHAPTER 24

### Paul Charged Before Felix

**24:1 - THE HIGH PRIEST CAME.** *“After five days Ananias the high priest came down with some elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. These men presented their case against Paul to the governor.”* Luke was inspired to write the Gospel account identified with his name, as well as the Book of Acts, or the Acts of the Apostles. In reality, nothing shows through more than the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the redeemed, and in the ministry of the early church. The Gospels are not technically historical accounts, but in reality they provide a historical record of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Those who would dismiss the Four Gospels as simply moral lessons have been deceived. They must embrace such a heresy to justify their position if they reject the Bible as

their authority, as two Episcopal priests did on the Hannity and Colmes program on Fox News immediately after they had elected an openly admitted homosexual priest as a Bishop.

Luke, early believers were convinced, was inspired to write the Gospel of Luke. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels (meaning seeing alike). John is the evangelistic Gospel. Dr. William R. Cooper, to whom this volume is dedicated, has stressed that Martin Luther had read many times that “the just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17), but one day he read it from the Scripture itself and immediately the Holy Spirit shined the light of truth on the passage and the Reformation was launched. He and I communicate daily and in one message he stated that the Lollards had to make do with a corrupted copy of the Scripture, but they seemed to know what part was inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit miraculously inspired the writers of Scripture; He miraculously preserved the Word of God against every satanic effort to destroy it (when has anyone ever sought to destroy a manuscript of anything written by Socrates or Aristotle?); and He miraculously illuminates the hearts of those who are willing to believe when they read it today.

Luke is writing history here, and he tells us in the opening words of both Luke and The Book of Acts that he researched everything of which he wrote. “After five days” provides a little historical reference that distinguishes the Bible from myth and legend. When the earliest readers read this inspired Scripture many of them knew the circumstances well enough to confirm or refute the account. No doubt, the high priest and the entire Sanhedrin would have learned almost immediately that Claudius Lysias had ordered Paul taken to Caesarea in order to deliver him from the plot by more than 40 would be assassins who vowed not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. The high priest and chief priests had entered into that murderous conspiracy. The entire Sanhedrin may have learned of Paul’s deliverance from the commander who would have notified them that Paul had been taken to Felix in Caesarea and would not be appearing before the Sanhedrin as they requested, or planned to request.

It would have taken five days to meet, to agree to hire a Roman lawyer to present their case before Felix the governor, and to travel to Caesarea and get ready for the hearing. They hired a lawyer named Tertullus, of whom nothing else is revealed. They then had to travel to Caesarea with leading elders. Robertson writes:

“A deputation of elders along with the high priest Ananias, not the whole Sanhedrin, but no hint of the forty conspirators or of the Asian Jews. The Sanhedrin had become divided so that now it is probably Ananias (mortally offended) and the Sadducees who take the lead in the prosecution of Paul. It is not clear whether after five days is from Paul’s departure from Jerusalem or his arrival in Caesarea. If he spent nine days in Jerusalem, then the five days would be counted from then (verse Acts 24:11)” [ATR].

**PRESENTED THEIR CASE.** Luke tells us that “These men presented their case against Paul to the governor.” It would be interesting to know what happened with the 40 or more men who had entered the conspiracy to ambush Paul. They had taken a vow that they would neither eat nor drink until Paul was dead. No doubt there was an escape clause in the vow.

When they were given an opportunity, their case against Paul was presented by Terullus, their Roman lawyer. Roman law, under such circumstances, may have required that a Roman lawyer present the case before the governor. However, it would have been foolish for these Jewish leaders to go into the governor's court without full knowledge of Roman law. Furthermore, Tertullus may have presented the case in Latin, a language in which the high priest and elders would not have been proficient.

**24:2 - BEGAN TO ACCUSE HIM.** *“When he was called in, Tertullus began to accuse him and said: “Since we enjoy great peace because of you, and reforms are taking place for the benefit of this nation by your foresight...”* Tertullus was called in to present the case against Paul, and he immediately began what today would be an embarrassing spectacle of flattery and groveling before the governor. Concerning this spectacle, Barnes wrote, “This was said in the customary style of flatterers and orators, to conciliate his favour, and is strikingly in contrast with the more honest and straightforward introduction in the reply of Paul, Acts 24:10” [BARNES].

Felix is given credit by some for keeping peace in the province. He had “arrested a band of robbers, with Eleazar at their head, whom he had sent to Rome to be punished, (Jos. Ant. b. xx. chap. viii. ;) he had arrested the Egyptian false prophet, who had led out four thousand men into the wilderness, and who threatened the peace of Judea, See Barnes "Acts 21:38"; and he had repressed a sedition which arose between the inhabitants of Caesarea and of Syria. Jos. Jewish Wars, b. ii. chap. xiii. 2" [BARNES]. Robertson adds, “Felix had suppressed a riot, but 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. But it sounded well to praise Felix for keeping peace in his province, especially as Tertullus was going to accuse Paul of being a disturber of the peace” [ATR].

The point Tertullus seems to try to make in the opening statement is that Felix had brought peace to the region, but Paul was violating that peace. No doubt, Felix could hope for nothing more than for the emperor to read these words about him in the report he would send to Rome.

**24:3 - WE GRATEFULLY RECEIVE.** *“(W)e gratefully receive them always and in all places, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.”* Tertullus spends almost as much time flattering Felix as he does presenting the case against Paul. “His description of Felix was obviously **fawning flattery**, for Felix was known for his violent use of repressive force and corrupt self-aggrandizement. Felix had been a slave, won his freedom, and curried favor with the imperial court. Tacitus, a Roman historian, bitingly summed up Felix's character with the terse comment, “**He exercised royal power with the mind of a slave**” [BKC, bold added by this writer].

**24:4 - BURDEN.** *“However, so that I will not burden you any further, I beg you in your graciousness to give us a brief hearing.”* The flattery continues even through the transition from the “fawning flattery” to the presentation of the case against Paul. “However” implies that if given time he could continue to praise the governor! He might have gone on with the praise, but since Felix was

so busy serving Rome and protecting the province, to continue would be a hindrance. Paul uses this same word (to hinder or to burden in various epistles. For example, in writing to the church at Thessalonica, he says, “So we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us” (1 Thess 2:18).

**I BEG.** “I beg you in your graciousness to give us a brief hearing.” It would be interesting to have heard this Roman attorney in person. Was this common in addressing Felix? Did other Roman attorneys address other governors and judges like this? Or did this attorney know that Felix expected it? Perhaps he needed softening up by such flattery. Tertullus begs for a brief hearing, a superfluous request since the hearing had been scheduled for that purpose.

**24:5 - WE HAVE FOUND.** “*For we have found this man to be a plague, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the Roman world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes!*” The NASB reads, “We have found this man a real pest.” There are three specific charges they bring against Paul through this lawyer. The first is that the Paul was a pest! However, the governor would not have been amused. The word he used (pestis—the plague or pestilence), was “used by both Greek and Roman authors to signify a very bad and profligate man; we have weakened the force of the word by translating the substantive adjectively. Tertullus did not say that Paul was a pestilent fellow, but he said that he was the very pestilence itself” [CLARKE]. This charge had political overtones [BKC].

**THROUGHOUT THE ROMAN WORLD.** Paul, according to Tertullus, was “a plague” (pest), and he was “an agitator among the Jews throughout the Roman world.” The high priest and elders of Israel would have received reports of riots and disturbances among Jews in various places where Paul had served. He does not mention the fact that Paul was the victim of Jewish mobs in various places, never the perpetrator of violence. Nevertheless, the charge is that he instigated those disturbances.

There are **four charges** brought against Paul. **The first charge** was that **he was a pest**. **The second charge** was that **he excited riots and sedition** among the Jews throughout the Roman world. This charge also concerned the government “because Tertullus made it appear that Christianity was divorced from the Jewish religion. Rome permitted Judaism as a *religio licita* (a legal religion), but it would not tolerate any new religions. By describing Christianity as a “sect” (*haireseos*, “faction, party, school”; whence the Eng. “heresy”) of the Nazarenes, the attorney made Paul’s faith appear to be cultic and bizarre” [BKC].

**SECT OF THE NAZARENES.** **The third charge** was that he was “**a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.**” This is very interesting, because the dominant sects among the Jews were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. There were also some minor sects, like the Essenes. The purpose here is to identify Paul with the followers of Jesus the Nazarene, whom the Sanhedrin would like to see portrayed in the worst possible light. The followers of Jesus were the victims of discrimination, charges, abuse, and violence, but they were not the instigators of sedition or violence.

Elsewhere, in another volume in this series on Acts, I mention the fact that Dr. William R. Cooper listens to Israeli radio every evening from his home in England. To illustrate how Jews in Israel

today feel about Jesus, he said that one radio host said, “We had rather see sodomites marching in the street than to have Christians here.” Such is their hatred for Jesus, in spite of the fact that Christians around the world pray for Israel, and Christians in America lobby for our support of Israel. It is possible that by labeling Paul a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, the Jews would like for Felix to identify him with leaders of earlier riots and insurrections with which he had been forced to deal since coming to his post as governor. Perhaps they wanted Felix to believe that Paul was as great a threat to peace in Israel as the insurrectionists he had dealt with in the past.

**24:6 - TRIED TO DESECRATE.** *“He even tried to desecrate the temple, so we apprehended him [and wanted to judge him according to our law.]”* Now, we come to **the fourth charge** against Paul. He is accused of **desecrating the temple**. Desecrating the temple also had political overtones “because the Romans had given the Jews permission to execute any Gentile who went inside the barrier of the temple (cf. 21:28). At this point Tertullus modified the original charge made in 21:28. There Paul was accused of bringing a Gentile (Trophimus the Ephesian) into the temple courts; here Paul is said to have attempted desecration. The truth was severely damaged in the clause **so we seized him**, the implication being they took Paul to arrest him” [BKC]. The Jews had, in fact, dragged him from the temple complex and were obviously attempting to beat him to death.

**24:7 - BUT LYSIAS.** *“But Lysias the commander came and took him from our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you.”* Attorneys typically present a case in the way that serves their client’s best interest. There will be a situation that grabs the attention of the media and some host will bring in a panel to discuss the case. Sometimes, the host will say to one of the attorneys, “You are a former prosecutor. How would you present this in court?” Or the host will say to another, “You are a defense attorney. How would you defend this person?” The two attorneys will have listened to the same evidence but they take opposite positions. Mark Furman is often asked to investigate a case for Fox News, as in the case Pederson case in Illinois in 2007. We met Mark Furman during the O. J. Simpson murder trial when he testified concerning the evidence the police had uncovered. It is possible that Simpson was acquitted because of the defense attorney was able to label him as a racist. When one listens today, Mark Furman clearly believes O. J. Simpson got away with a double murder. He dealt with facts, but the defense attorney attacked the police officer. Here, Tertullus, representing the chief priest and elders of the Jews, seems to blame Claudius Lysias for a miscarriage of justice. The Jewish leaders would have handled the situation if he had not interfered! He implies that the Jews could have dealt with Paul on the spot if the commander had not taken him from them and ordered them to make their charges before the governor.

**24:8 - BY EXAMINING HIM.** *“By examining him yourself you will be able to discern all these things of which we accuse him.”* Tertullus aggressively affirms his confidence in Felix. By examining Paul, he is saying, Felix would be able to determine that all the charges against Paul were true. Of course, Felix would examine Paul by questioning him, not by torture, since he was a Roman citizen. The lawyer is clearly trying to influence the attitude with which the governor would question Paul. In other words, he wants Felix to assume Paul to be guilty of all the charges before he begins to question him.

**24:9 - THE JEWS ALSO.** *“The Jews also joined in the attack, alleging that these things were so.”* By “the Jews, Luke means the high priest and the elders. How did they join in the attack on Paul? Felix probably asked them if they agreed with the charges as Felix had presented them.

“They had gone as the accusers of Paul; and they bore testimony, when called upon, to the truth of all that the orator had said. Whether they were examined individually or not, is not declared. In whatever way their testimony was arrived at, they confirmed unanimously the accusation which he had brought against Paul” [BARNES].

## Paul’s Defense Before Felix

**24:10 - PAUL REPLIED.** *“When the governor motioned to him to speak, Paul replied: “Because I know you have been a judge of this nation for many years, I am glad to offer my defense in what concerns me.”* Since what we are reading is what Francis Schaeffer often referred to as space/time history, rather than myth or legend, we can only imagine the emotions, the possibilities, the opportunities, and the risks of the moment. It is easy enough for me to say that this was a golden opportunity for Paul; it is not my life that is in danger. My life does not depend my eloquence, my reason, or even my body language. We can only imagine he stress Paul was experiencing as his fellow Jews sought so “religiously” to have him killed. The governor gives him an opportunity to speak. What gave him the courage to speak more clearly and logically than Tertullus, who was no doubt the best lawyer they could find? In the **first** place, Jesus had appeared to him and told him he was going to Rome. In the **second** place, the Holy Spirit was empowering him and guiding him. In the **third** place, all he had to do was tell the truth, he didn’t have to make up a lie.

Even with all of that going for him, he knew something of the nature and character of the governor, and he may well have known that Felix was a corrupt judge. When my brother began practicing law I began learning things I had not known about Lawyers in the past. Well, maybe I had a hint when my brother Mike told our grandfather he was going to law school. Granddaddy very seriously asked, “Son, don’t you think you could find something worthwhile to do?” Mike went on to law school had he had enjoyed a very successful practice for a number of years. He is the senior partner in a very reputable law firm today. I mentioned one particular attorney’s name to him, a name I had heard often from other people and from the media. Mike said, “All we ever want to know here is that the other side has hired that man. I recently checked our records and over the last few years we are 17 and 0 against him.” Mike made an impression on me on another occasion when he made the statement that he heard people make the statement that, “All I ever want is my day in court. They are deceived if they think they are always going to receive justice.”

During the 2007 Christmas season, a little girl went to a Christmas program at her church and found herself sitting behind a man who had sexually abused her, but walked out of court a free man when the little girl became so frightened that she could not testify in the court. The judge said he was forced to dismiss the case. They later learned that if they had tried that case in another city in the

same state the little girl would not have been required to testify in the presence of this vile man who had abused her. She was horrified when she found herself sitting behind him in her church. There are indeed miscarriages of justice in this world.

Paul was not in a friendly court, but when he was given an opportunity to speak he does so with confidence and courage. Former Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Officer Ray Harrison was both a friend and a member of the church I served as pastor for 13 years. He once told me that after years of experience you could look at a witness on the stand, listen to him, and watch his eyes and know if he was telling the truth. He then said, "If a man can sit on the witness stand and look the prosecutor in the eye and lie and never bat an eye he could convince the court that he was telling the truth." He then went on to tell me about a duck hunter who had clearly broken the law. The man was such an accomplished liar that he convince the judge that he was a novice and couldn't distinguish one kind of duck from another. The evidence, including his boat, decoys, duck blind, and other gear clearly showed that the man was a long-time, experienced duck hunter. The judge couldn't believe a man would lie about such things since he had his young son with him.

An older man I knew well was charged with conspiracy after he went to visit his brother who was in jail on serious charges. When he was searched the officer at the jail found a letter in his possession written by his brother's attorney to the prisoner. In the letter the lawyer told the prisoner to make a statement in court that was not true. The man who delivered the letter was barely literate and did not know what the letter contained, and in any case never thought to open and read a sealed note from an attorney, but he was arrested and charged with conspiracy in a serious case. The attorney spent two years in a federal prison and the innocent brother spent a fortune and saw his family suffer along with him for two years before he was finally cleared. The man's daughter once pointed out to me the man who had been the jury chairman who had spoken the words, "Not guilty" at the trial. The whole experience was traumatic for the man and his family.

Paul stands before a corrupt governor, who must have been weighing his options. In the first place, Paul was a Roman citizen and that spoke volumes as to how the case had to be handled. In the second place, if he crossed these Jewish religious leaders, they would be sending letters to Caesar in an effort to have him replaced as governor.

As one would have expected, Felix, after hearing the charges against Paul by Tertullus, and the intense affirmations from the high priest and elders of the Jews, turns to the prisoner and gives him an opportunity to speak. Paul confidently responded, "Because I know you have been a judge of this nation for many years, I am glad to offer my defense in what concerns me." Rather than resort to the fawning flattery of Tertullus, Paul opens with a two-part statement. **First**, he noted that Felix had been governor of this province for "many years". In fact, he had been the governor for seven years. In the **second** place, he is ready to respond to the charges.

**24:11 - YOU ARE ABLE.** *"You are able to determine that it is no more than 12 days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem."* Paul does not resort to flattery, but he does acknowledge that Felix was qualified to hear the evidence and determine what was true and what was not. He had gone to Jerusalem only twelve days earlier, and he had been in jail in Caesarea for five days.

Furthermore, he had been in the custody of Claudius Lysias for at least one day, and he had been on the road in the custody of a Roman officer for a night and a day. That did not leave a lot of time for him to found “the sect of the Nazarenes” and lead an insurrection. It had only been twelve days since he had gone “up to worship in Jerusalem”. He could account for his time during those twelve days. *The New Commentary on the Whole Bible New Testament*, provides us with the details in that clearly refutes the charges. See

“21:15, 18, 26, 27; 22:30; 23:11, 12, 23, 32; 24:1. Chapters 21 and 22 of Acts record the events of those twelve days: Paul arrived in Jerusalem, met with James and the elders, and went to the temple to make a vow. There he was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. The Jews planned to kill Paul, but their plan was discovered, and Paul was quickly taken from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Acts 24:1 mentions the remaining days. Paul’s point was that he could not have done all that he was accused of in so short a time. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, not create any disturbance” [NCWB].

**24:12 - DISPUTING.** “*And they didn’t find me disputing with anyone or causing a disturbance among the crowd, either in the temple complex or in the synagogues, or anywhere in the city.*” The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes Paul’s defense on this point: “Paul gave several points in his own defense. First, he had not been in **Jerusalem** long enough to instigate a riot. In fact one of his purposes for being in Jerusalem was **to worship**, to observe the Feast of Pentecost (20:16). Another reason was developed in 24:17-18. Second, even Paul’s calumniators could **not** cite an instance when he instigated a riot in the city” [BKC].

**24:13 - NEITHER CAN THEY.** “*Neither can they provide evidence to you of what they now bring against me.*” Not only had they not made their case against him, Paul insists that they could not provide evidence to support the charges they were making before the governor.

**24:14 - BUT I CONFESS.** “*But I confess this to you: that according to the Way, which they call a sect, so I worship my fathers’ God, believing all the things that are written in the Law and in the Prophets.*” The Holy Spirit was guiding Paul now, just as Jesus had promised: “So when they arrest you and hand you over, don’t worry beforehand what you will say. On the contrary, whatever is given to you in that hour—say it. **For it isn’t you speaking, but the Holy Spirit**” (Mark 13:11, bold added by this writer). Paul was given an opportunity and he was not about to miss it. He does not offer a point by point rebuttal of the claims presented by Tertullus for the high priest and elders. Instead, he confesses the truth.

**ACCORDING TO THE WAY.** This is how the Jewish leaders referred to the followers of Jesus Christ. They did not often use His name, and when they did it was never in a way that would give credence to His claim that He was the Messiah. Dr. Bill Cooper, to whom this volume is dedicated, sent the following message to me in 2007:

“It was only recently that I realised something of the full force of Jewish

hatred for Christians, and hence for our Lord. On Israel National Radio - which I listen to avidly every evening just to watch how things are unfolding over there - **they refer to our Lord as the "'J' guy"** on the pretense that they are forbidden by Torah from mentioning the names of foreign gods" (bold added by this writer).

**WHICH THEY CALL A SECT.** The Jewish leaders hated Jesus and they hated His disciples. On some program during the 2007 Christmas season, Fox News showed another of those "fair and balanced" presentations on Jesus. Someone made the statement that Jesus was "uneducated", and the implication seemed to have been that He was ignorant. In reality, Jesus baffled the most brilliant Jewish scholars in the temple complex when He was twelve years old.

If the Jews could have Christianity labeled as an unlawful sect, they would not only have influenced Felix in this case, they would have labeled all followers of Christ as enemies of Rome. Paul does not debate the point here. He simply pleads guilty to being every bit as faithful to the Scriptures as his accusers: "I worship my fathers' God, believing all the things that are written in the Law and in the Prophets." By saying "my father's God", Paul is clearly identifying himself with the Jewish nation. In other words, he is saying, I am a Jew and I worship the God of Israel, believing everything written in the Law and Prophets. Paul makes a twofold argument before Felix:

"(1) Israel was divided into the two religious sects of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Paul here asserts that he simply belongs to a third sect, the Nazarenes, and that because of this he is despised. (2) The Roman law allowed every nation to worship their own God. Thus, Paul felt that he had the right to worship the same God as a member of a different sect. **believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets**—Paul affirmed the authority and veracity of the OT" [NCWB].

**24:15 - A HOPE IN GOD.** *"And I have a hope in God, which these men themselves also accept, that there is going to be a resurrection, both of the righteous and the unrighteous."* Paul does not introduce the resurrection here to try to divide the Pharisees and the Sadducees, nor would he have expected mob scene like the one from which Claudius Lysias had been forced to rescue him when he appeared before the Sanhedrin. They were now standing before the governor now, not a local commander.

There were obviously some Pharisees in the group that accused Paul before Felix, but his point is that his belief in the resurrection, like theirs, came from the same Scripture they used and believed (the Law and the Prophets were read in the synagogue every Sabbath).

**RESURRECTION.** This is a clear statement, inspired by the Holy Spirit, "there is going to be a resurrection, both of the righteous and the unrighteous." One reading the Books of History in the Old Testament may not find such hope, and obviously, many of the prophetic books did not specifically address the resurrection. However, the Book of Job, which I am convinced was the first

Old Testament book written, affirms Job's belief in the resurrection: "But I know my Redeemer lives, and He will stand on the dust at last" (Job 19:25). Paul, in his defense, is saying, "I not only do not hold any thing by which the general creed of this people might be altered, in reference to the present state; but, also, I hold nothing different from their belief in reference to a future state; for, if I maintain the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, it is what themselves allow" [CLARKE].

When I became a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I discovered that there were a few pastors and teachers around who held to the theory of annihilation, that the redeemed would go to heaven, but the lost would simply cease to exist. Needless to say, they rejected what the Bible teaches about hell and having done so, were forced to come up with an explanation of what happened to the unsaved at death. The New Testament is clear enough on the subject, as we see in Rev. 21:8.

**24:16 - A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.** *"I always do my best to have a clear conscience toward God and men."* Paul, in his defense, lists guidelines of his life which "were quite opposed to trouble making and sectarianism (cf. 23:1; 2 Cor. 1:12; 2:17)" [NCWB]. One's conscience is formed on the forge of teachings and experience. One's conscience may in fact be reshaped by continued violation of his conscience. Paul's conscience had been reshaped through the ministry of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God (the Law and the Prophets, vs. 14).

**24:17 - AFTER MANY YEARS.** *"After many years, I came to bring charitable gifts and offerings to my nation..."* If by "many years" Paul had meant that there had been many years since his conversion, it had indeed been many years. This trial took place around A. D. 59, and he had been converted over twenty years earlier. However, if he has in mind his last visit to Jerusalem, that would have been some five years earlier, assuming he went up to Jerusalem at the close of the Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:22).

**CHARITABLE GIFTS.** The charitable gifts and offerings, collected during the Second Missionary Journey in Asia, Macedonia, and Greece, were taken to Jerusalem ("to my nation") for the relief of the suffering saints in Jerusalem (1Co 16:1-4; 2Co 8; 2Co 9; Rom 15:26) "who were none the less Jews" [ATR].

"This is the only time in Acts Paul's goal of bringing an offering to Jerusalem from the Gentile churches is mentioned. Luke did not stress this because it was not a major factor in his argument. However, it was most important to Paul as is evidenced by his frequent allusions to it in his epistles (Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:13-14; 9:12-13; Gal. 2:10)" [BKC].

**AND OFFERINGS.** We can distinguish between the charitable gifts collected by the Churches in places like Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth and the offerings given in connection with the vow involving four men at the temple.

"And offerings" (kai prosporas). The very word used in Acts 21:26 of the

offerings or sacrifices made by Paul for the four brethren and himself. It does not follow that it was Paul's original purpose to make these "offerings" before he came to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 18:18). He came up to worship (verse Acts 24:11) and to be present at Pentecost (Acts 20:16)" [ATR] .

**24:18 - WHILE I WAS DOING THIS.** *"(A)nd while I was doing this, some Jews from the province of Asia found me ritually purified in the temple, without a crowd and without any uproar."* It was not while Paul was delivering the charitable gifts to James and the local church, but while he was in the process of giving the offering for himself and the four men with whom he had taken the vow that "some Jews from the province of Asia found me ritually purified in the temple." He declares that there was no crowd and no disturbance, until they created the disturbance. It is not surprising that these Asian Jews recognized him, for they had heard him in their synagogue in Ephesus, and they had been very much aware of his success in reaching both Jews and Gentiles for Jesus after they had forced him out of the synagogue. He was not creating "any uproar" but it did not take them long to cause one.

**24:19 - IT IS THEY.** *"It is they who ought to be here before you to bring charges, if they have anything against me."* Now, Paul hits on the very thing that destroyed their case against him. Where were the witnesses? All they had presented was hear-say. "He again alluded to the inconsistency of the Pharisees, who sided with him one minute and were against him the next" [NCWB]. Robertson summarizes, "The accusers who were present had not witnessed the alleged offence: those who could have given evidence at first-hand were not present" (Furneaux). There was no case in a Roman court. These Asiatic Jews are never heard of after the riot, though they almost succeeded in killing Paul then" [ATR].

**24:20 - LET THESE MEN.** *"Either let these men here state what wrongdoing they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin..."* Paul now drives the final nail into the coffin of these charges that have now suddenly expired. In the absence of viable first hand witnesses, Paul insists, "let these men here" (the chief priest and elders) make a statement as to what they had personally witnessed when they "found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin." Clarke provides a brief synopsis here:

"The Jews of Asia, the most competent witnesses, though my declared enemies, and they who stirred up the persecution against me, should have been here: why are they kept back? Because they could prove nothing against me. Let these, therefore, who are here, depose, if they have found any evil in me, or proved against me, by my most virulent adversaries, when examined before them in their council at Jerusalem" [CLARKE]..

**24:21 - THIS ONE STATEMENT.** *"(O)r about this one statement I cried out while standing among them, 'Today I am being judged before you concerning the resurrection of the dead.'" The one statement was a statement about the resurrection. The Sanhedrin had been ordered by the commander to meet to hear Paul's defense. When it became obvious that he would receive no fair hearing in Jerusalem, he did indeed cry out "concerning the resurrection of the dead", at which time*

the Sanhedrin became a scene of pandemonium, as the Pharisees turned against the Sadducees.

Paul has pointed out the simple fact that the Jews from the province of Asia who had made the false allegations and incited the riot in the temple (cf. 21:27) were not present for this hearing were not present. Furthermore, “since the Sanhedrin had not found him guilty 23:1-9), Tertullus’ speech did not really contain any legitimate charges” [BKC]. The case must have become very clear to Felix by this time. They had no case against Paul, and Felix knew it.

## Justice Delayed, Justice Denied

**24: 22 - FELIX WAS ACCURATELY INFORMED.** *“Since Felix was accurately informed about the Way, he adjourned the hearing, saying, ‘When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.’”* As we have come to expect of Luke, his account is presented sequentially and concisely. Felix has heard both sides of the case against Paul. The Roman lawyer Tertullus, representing the high priest and elders of Judaism, both flattered Felix and presented a one-sided case against Paul. When given an opportunity to speak, Paul offered a masterful defense, evidence that the Lord had sent His Spirit to guide him in his defense and strengthen him so that he could stand before the most powerful man in the province and think fearlessly, cogently, and logically. His Roman citizenship and the letter from Claudius Lysias out weighted the hostile shouts of the high priest and the elders.

**ADJOURNED THE HEARING.** Having heard the evidence against Paul and his defense against those charges **Felix might have rendered a verdict then and there**, but of course he did not to that. Instead, he said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.” The Roman governor of the entire province had been “accurately informed about the Way”, **and he might have rendered a verdict one way or the other.** Instead, he postponed the hearing until Claudius Lysias came from Jerusalem so that he could provide additional evidence, had there been any. In other words, **Paul might well have been freed and permitted to continue his journey to Rome. Instead, justice was delayed**, and is often the case, **justice delayed is justice denied.** Why did Felix not release Paul after he heard the evidence? Luke pulls back the veil so we can see that the Roman governors were often cautious in dealing with Jews. Felix had power over the whole province, yet he fears these Jewish leaders. Why would he fear them? They could keep pressure on the governor by constantly sending letters to the emperor, who in turn would have the governor investigated. Both the governor’s life and his position were at stake in a case like this one.

**24:23 - ORDERED THE CENTURION.** *“He ordered that the centurion keep Paul under guard, though he could have some freedom, and that he should not prevent any of his friends from serving him.”* Felix gave the centurion on duty specific orders concerning Paul, the first of which was to keep him under guard. He might have released him but he did not for two reasons. **First**, he wanted to please the Jews, which is interesting since they were a conquered people and he was the governor of the province with authority over them. Why would he want to appease people who

hated all Gentiles? Roman had conquered that part of the world, but they never conquered the spirit of the Jews. The high priest and elders could create problems for him with the emperor by writing that Felix failed to administer justice. It had worked when they pressed their case against Jesus with Pilate and persuaded him to sentence Jesus to be crucified, even though he knew He was innocent. In the **second** place, he may have sought to please them in order to see if they would offer him a bribe. There is no doubt that he sought a bribe from Paul.

**SOME FREEDOM.** This freedom may have meant that, while he was not released from prison, he may not have had to continue to be chained to a guard when not being moved from one place to another. The governor's reason for ordering the centurion to allow Paul "some freedom" was probably not mercy or compassion. Paul was, it was reported, a Roman citizen, yet he had grown up a strict Jew. How did he receive his Roman citizenship? Those who did not win it on the battle field might purchase it. He may have taken a look at Paul, who according to tradition, was a small man with bad eyesight. If so, Felix may have jumped to the conclusion that Paul had purchased his citizenship, and if so, he might be wealthy enough to offer him a bribe.

**HIS FRIENDS.** Felix also ordered that "he should not prevent any of his friends from serving him." Who were these friends? On their way to Jerusalem, Paul and his companions visited with the church there. Friends would have included Philip and his four daughters who were prophets, as well as other believers in Caesarea. It is possible that these friends included his traveling companions. Luke tells us that when Paul left Corinth to go to Jerusalem: "He was accompanied by Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, from Beroea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia" (Acts 20:3-4). We are not told, however, whether or not all of these men went all the way to Jerusalem with Paul, or how many of them may have gone on to Caesarea. Luke, of course, was one of the friends who would stay there as long as Paul was a prisoner, and then accompany him to Rome.

Why would Felix issue the order that his friends could serve him? Once again, **it is doubtful that he was motivated by compassion.** He may have assumed that his friends might help raise the money for a bribe. After all, they had helped raise the offering that Paul delivered to James for the suffering saints in Jerusalem. He did know that Paul was a Roman citizen and that **Caesar or one of his aids might some day read the records of this hearing** and he did not want it to appear that he had treated a Roman citizen unjustly.

**24:24 - AFTER SOME DAYS.** *"After some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and listened to him on the subject of faith in Christ Jesus."* What we are reading here is time/space history. These are real people doing real things at a real time in history. Luke is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but there is more. He researched carefully everything of which he wrote (1:1f). He was probably in Caesarea at this time. If not, he would have heard all about it from Paul.

**PERSONAL ILLUSTRATION:** When I was a young pastor, I often preached from this passage when I preached at various camps at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, the Hinds

County Jail in Jackson, and in revivals. I preached two different sermons based on these verses: “On Trial” and “No Convenient Season”. I often joked in those days that I had a “captive audience” at the prison and the county jail. I stressed that everyone there knew what it meant to be on trial in this world. They knew far better than I what it was like to stand before a judge and hear him pronounce the sentence. I had the privilege of witnessing to a few men in the County Jail in Jackson who received a life sentence for murder. Tommy had committed a brutal murder while he was drunk, but Taylor was cold sober when he killed his wife of two weeks, after taking out a life insurance policy on her for ten thousand dollars. That was cold blooded, pre-meditated murder. Both men were miraculously, even spectacularly saved in the county jail as I witnessed to them (I describe their experience in the introduction to my commentary on Ephesians (see PastorLife.Com). I will never forget Tommy and Taylor, but there was another man to whom I witnessed in the county jail that I cannot forget. I shared Scripture with “Bill” and asked him if he would like to pray to ask Jesus Christ into his life. He said, “I know I need to, but I am a three time loser and I have a lot of lying to do when I go to court, and I can’t become a Christian and do that” (I wish some church members understood that!). He was looking for “A More Convenient Season”. He would soon be “On Trial”. However, he was preparing for his plea before a judge in Jackson, Mississippi, but gave no thought to the fact that he was going to have to stand before an omnipotent, omniscient Judge at some point in his future. Taylor has been in heaven for many years now and I will someday visit with him and with my friend Tommy. However, unless Bill” was saved later, he will spend eternity in hell (conscious, eternal torment) with the most vile people who ever lived on this earth. But that is not the worst of it. He will spend eternity in hell with the devil and all the demons who deceived him.

**DRUSILLA.** Information about Drusilla may seem sketchy, but it is amazing how much we do know about her, as illustrated the sketch carried by Adam Clarke:

“We have already seen that Felix was thrice married: two of his wives were named Drusilla; one was a Roman, **the niece or grand-daughter of Antony and Cleopatra**, mentioned by Tacitus, lib. v. cap. 9. **The other, the person in the text, was a Jewess, daughter to Herod Agrippa the Great.** See Acts 12:1, etc. When she was but six years of age, she was affianced to **Epiphanes, son of Antiochus, king of Comagene**, who had promised to embrace Judaism on her account; but, as he did not keep his word, her brother Agrippa (mentioned Acts 25:13) refused to ratify the marriage. About the year of our Lord 53, he married her to Azizus, king of the Emesenes, who received her on condition of being circumcised. Felix having seen her, fell desperately in love with her, and by means of a pretended Jewish magician, a native of Cyprus, persuaded her to leave her husband; on which Felix took her to wife. She appears, on the whole, to have been a person of indifferent character; though one of the finest women of that age. It is said that she, and a son she had by Felix, were consumed in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius. See Josephus, Antiq. lib. xx. cap. 7, and see Calmet and Rosenmuller” [CLARKE].

It would be interesting to know why Clarke considered her “one of the finest women of that age”. She was living in an adulterous relationship with Felix. She was a Jewess, but she was married to a

Gentile. Of course, in that day, he may not have given her a choice. The Holman Bible Dictionary carries the note that “She was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. She had been engaged to Antiochus Ephiphanes of Commagene, but he refused to become a Jew. King Aziz of Emesa did agree to be circumcized, and they were married. Atomos, a magician from Cyprus, helped Felix win Drusilla away from her husband. Apparently, her son Agrippa died when Mount Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79. She may have also died in this disaster” [HBD].

**FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS.** Felix “sent for Paul and listened to him on the subject of faith in Christ Jesus.” One might read this and think that Felix is under conviction of sin and looking for salvation in Jesus Christ, but this could not be further from the truth. He already knew all he needed to know, as we see in verse 22: “Felix was accurately informed about the Way.” Since he had accurate knowledge of the charges against Paul, he may well have had one thing in mind. Paul would soon learn that Felix was looking for a bribe (vs. 26).

**24:25 - AS HE SPOKE.** *“Now as he spoke about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became afraid and replied, ‘Leave for now, but when I find time I’ll call for you.’”*

The stage is set. Felix and his wife Drusilla are in their seats, secure under the protection of a unit of the most powerful army in the history of the world. The prisoner has been brought in to stand before the governor and his wife. Paul is standing now where many prisoners may well have stood before, and he is given an opportunity to speak. Now consider a few questions: (1) why had Felix sent for Paul; (2) why was Drusilla there; (3) how did other prisoners act as they stood before the governor; and (4) how is it that Paul is able to comport himself as he did under these circumstances?

To answer each question briefly, I will begin with **the first one**: there can be no doubt that Felix loved this arena in which he could (a) flaunt his power and position; (b) put on a demonstration of his power and brilliance to officers, troops, and guests; and (c) provide his prisoner with an opportunity to offer him a bribe.

As to **the second question**: Drusilla may have wanted to be there (it was the best show in town). This setting may well have provided her with an opportunity to revel in her husband’s power, and to show off her robes and jewelry. It was certainly an opportunity to bask in the glory and power of Rome.

For **the third question**: A prisoner standing before any judge may be expected to be nervous, stressed, frightened. The situation here was wrought with opportunities for a prisoner to say the wrong thing and pay a severe price, including scourging, imprisonment, or a brutal death. Unless the prisoner was a Roman citizen, there was no appeal, and no constitutional “rights” to protect him. The prisoner’s body language and voice would have indicated the intensity of his fear and dread.

Finally, there is **the fourth question**: Paul was probably standing erect, his head up, his voice strong, and his body language manifesting assurance that would have been very unusual in this court. Bill O’Reilly, on The O’Reilly Show, (the Fox News Network) attracts more viewers than the next three news programs combined at that hour, with 300,00 viewers left over, or so he reports. He has a

regular guest on who watches the clip of an individual speaking and then answers questions as to the individual's emotional state, veracity, attitudes, and conviction. The expert points out things that seem totally insignificant to the average person and then explains what it means. For example, a person is sitting with others for an interview and he leans a little to the right and his toe points more to the right than the left is saying to this expert that he likes those on the right more than the ones on the left. Every blink of the eye, every gesture, every inflection in speech, every hand or eye movement tells the expert something about the subject. It is almost certain that Felix and Drusilla had no such special training as this specialist, but they were experienced with prisoners and they could probably read them like a book.

Paul will speak when given the opportunity and when he does speak neither the governor, his wife, nor any of the soldiers there had ever seen anything like it before. For the first time every, Felix and Drusilla are looking at a prisoner who has already stood before the Supreme Judge and received assurance that he is going to Rome. Paul will speak courageously and brilliantly, but the focus of our attention will be, not his demeanor, but what he says.

**RIGHTEOUSNESS.** Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness. The Gospel is reasonable and Paul reasoned with the governor, he did not speak in tongues, fall out in the floor, or have some other ecstatic experience. Nor did he cringe before the governor. A number of years ago a lot of people were excited about a movement in Florida in which, according to some reports, people fell down on the floor and began barking like dogs, or laughing uncontrollably. Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness. But what does that really mean? The Holman Bible Dictionary defines righteousness and then shows how the term was used in the Bible:

“The actions and positive results of a sound relationship within a local community or between God and a person or His people. Translators have employed “righteousness” in rendering several biblical words into English: *sedaqah*, *sedeq*, in Hebrew; and *dikaiousune* and *euthutes* in Greek. “Righteousness” in the original languages denotes far more than in English usage; indeed, biblical righteousness is generally at odds with current English usage. We understand righteousness to mean “uprightness” in the sense of “adherence or conformity to an established norm.” In biblical usage righteousness is rooted in covenants and relationships. For biblical authors, righteousness is the fulfillment of the terms of a covenant between God and humanity or between humans in the full range of human relationships” [HBD].

After a discussion of meaning of righteousness in the Old Testament, the Holman Bible Dictionary discusses the New Testament use of the word:

“Greek philosophy understood righteousness to be one of the cardinal virtues, but New Testament authors show that they understood the word in terms of Old Testament thinking about covenantal relations. Human righteousness in the New Testament is absolute faith in and commitment to God (Matt. 3:15; Rom. 4:5; 1 Pet.

2:24). The one who in faith gives oneself to the doing of God's will is righteous, doing righteousness, and reckoned righteous by God (Jas. 2:23). The focus of faith in God is the saving activity of God in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-26). The human-to-human dimension of righteousness observed in the Old Testament is present in New Testament thought (Phil. 1:3-11), but it seems less prominent, perhaps because of the importance of the New Testament concept of love" [HBD].

The HBD notes the passage in Romans 3:21-26, in which Paul discusses righteousness:

"But now, apart from the law, God's righteousness has been revealed—attested by the Law and the Prophets—that is, **God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe**, since there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a propitiation through faith in His blood, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. He presented Him to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be righteous and **declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus**" (Romans 3:21-26, bold added by this writer).

Paul teaches in Romans that Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. In other words, Abraham had no righteousness until he believed God, and then the righteousness of God was imputed unto him. The New Testament clearly teaches that God demands righteousness of all who would stand in His presence, but that no human being can produce righteousness: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God" (Rom. 3:10-11). However, when we believe in Jesus Christ His righteousness is imputed unto us: "He presented Him to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be righteous and declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). Clothed in His righteousness we can come into the presence of Almighty God.

**SELF-CONTROL.** The Greek word (*egkrateiav*) denotes "Chastity; self-government or moderation with regard to a man's appetites, passions, and propensities of all kinds" [CLARKE]. It would be interesting to know how Paul dealt with this subject before a governor who had demonstrated a noted lack of self-control.

The KJV has "temperance", whereas the NASB and HCSB render it "self-control". This is fortunate, since at some point many began using the word "temperance" to denote laws against the consumption of alcoholic beverages. "The original word here denotes a restraint of all the passions and evil inclinations; and may be applied to prudence, chastity, and moderation in general. The particular thing in the life of Felix which Paul had probably in view, was the indulgence of licentious desires, or incontinence. He was living in adultery with Drusilla; and for this, Paul wished doubtless to bring him to repentance" [BARNES].

**THE JUDGMENT.** Modern Americans had rather not hear anything about judgment. The most popular preachers in America are the ones who do not talk about sin or its consequences. An attorney was in a Sunday School class in a medium sized city in the Bible Belt when someone asked what members thought was wrong with the churches in town. The lawyer, a quiet but frank man, said, “I will tell you what is wrong. I will guarantee you that most pastors will not mention sin from the pulpit this morning, and no one will use the word hell.” Since I knew a number of the pastors in his hometown, I felt sure that there were exceptions, but in a general sense that attorney knew something preachers seem to have forgotten.

My wife Becky and I stopped by a favorite restaurant and the server who came to our table was new to us. As I spoke with her I tried to determine whether or not she was a born again believer. I don’t recall my words, or her first response, but I was surprised when she went on to say, “I’ll tell you one thing, I am not going to any Baptist church. They are too judgmental!” The sad truth is, many Baptists, like those from other denominations, give little thought to the fact that there is a judgment to come. One writer summarizes this verse in this way: “**he reasoned [discussed] of righteousness**—This concerned Felix’s public life. **temperance**—self-control. This had to do with Felix’s immorality. **judgment to come**—He would be called to account for both righteousness and self-control” NCWB].

When Jonathan Edwards preached the sermon which may well be the most famous sermon ever preached in America, “*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*”, he never raised his voice and he never made any gestures. There were none of the things associated with that sermons that excites crowds today, yet while he was preaching that sermon people later testified that they were holding onto anything within their reach because they feared that they were slipping into hell.

R. G. Lee was my all-time favorite preacher, and his sermon, “*Pay Day Some Day*”, which he preached over 1200 times was by far my favorite sermon to hear (if not to read). Many people from the “Me Generation” would not want to hear “*Pay Day Some Day*”, but doubt seriously that Dr. Lee would have changed his message to please them. I heard Dr. Lee tell about the time a lady who had moved to Memphis from a northern city. She came by to see Dr. Lee. She said, “Dr. Lee, I am looking for a comfortable church. Is your church air-conditioned?” Dr. Lee said, “No and hell isn’t either!”

It would be a sad thing if the preacher spent all his time on judgment and never proclaimed the message of joy, peace, and hope we find in Jesus Christ. At the same time, it is a serious matter to edit judgment out of the Gospel message. The New Testament is filled with warnings of the punishment that awaits the sinner who does not repent. If someone accuses me of being too narrow, I would stress that I am nothing like as narrow as my Savior. For anyone who does not want to hear a sermon on judgment or hell, I would encourage a study of Revelation 20, in which we find the passage about the Great White Throne Judgment.

**FELIX TREMBLED.** “Felix became afraid and replied, ‘Leave for now, but when I find time I’ll call for you.’” The KJV reads, “Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25).

The story of the “hand writing on the wall” from Daniel is familiar to all Bible students. Daniel tells us that during the drunken orgies that were going on in the palace of King Belshazzar, a hand appeared and began writing on the wall of the king’s palace, and in the words of Daniel:

“At that moment the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the king’s palace wall next to the lampstand. As the king watched the hand that was writing, **his face turned pale, and his thoughts so terrified him that his hip joints shook and his knees knocked together**” (Dan 5:5-6).

For a brief time, Felix, having come face to face with his failure in both righteousness and self-control, trembled as he sat before his prisoner. Is this not amazing?! All present in that court room were used to seeing prisoners tremble before this powerful judge. Instead, **the judge trembles before his prisoner!** What did he do? What might he have done? He might have called on Jesus Christ for His mercy and grace. Instead, he sent Paul away. He said, “when I have a more convenient season I will call for you” (NKJV). As far as we know, Felix was never under conviction of sin again. He simply never found a convenient time to repent of his unrighteousness and lack of self-control. **There never will be a convenient time for Jesus Christ** for the simple reason that **Jesus is not a convenience**, but an essential for any person who would be saved from the wrath that is hell.

**24:26 - HE WAS HOPING.** “*At the same time he was also hoping that money would be given to him by Paul. For this reason he sent for him quite often and conversed with him.*” Justice is never assured when a prisoner stands before a judge who is more concerned with his or her reputation, reelection, or financial benefit than with justice. Felix knew the facts in the case and he might have released Paul. Now we find out why he had delayed judgment earlier. He was looking for a bribe. But why would he think Paul was in a position to offer him a bribe? Claudius Lysias had told Paul that he bought his Roman citizenship at great cost. Furthermore,

“Paul had mentioned the “alms” (Acts 24:17) and that excited the avarice of Felix for “money” (chrêmata). Roman law demanded exile and confiscation for a magistrate who accepted bribes, but it was lax in the provinces. Felix had doubtless received them before. Josephus (Ant. XX. 8, 9) represents Felix as greedy for money” [ATR].

Felix’s corruption was surpassed only by his perseverance. Luke tells us “he sent for him quite often and conversed with him.” Felix, as far as we know, was never under conviction of sin again. The judge was on trial and in time he would stand before the Righteous Judge to receive his sentence. He simply never found a convenient season to call on Jesus Christ for His salvation.

**24:27 - AFTER TWO YEARS.** “*After two years had passed, Felix received a successor,*

*Porcius Festus, and because he wished to do a favor for the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison.”* For two long years, Felix summoned Paul frequently to talk with him. Felix had one thing in mind and that was a bribe.

**TWO YEARS.** Paul was a prisoner for two years in Caesarea, when he might have been proclaiming the Gospel in Rome and Spain, had it not been for a crooked judge who wanted to please the Jews and at the same time solicit a bribe from his prisoner.

Paul's headquarters shifted from time to time, and now for two years, he had been a prisoner in Caesarea. We can be sure the Lord was providing an opportunity for ministry for Paul. He appeared before Felix often, and every time he spoke, Roman soldiers were present. Also, friends were permitted to visit him during this time.

“With all his travels Paul spent several years each at Tarsus, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, though not as a prisoner unless that was true part of the time at Ephesus for which there is some evidence though not of a convincing kind. We do not know that Luke remained in Caesarea all this time. In all probability he came and went with frequent visits with Philip the Evangelist. It was probably during this period that Luke secured the material for his Gospel and wrote part or all of it before going to Rome. He had ample opportunity to examine the eyewitnesses who heard Jesus and the first attempts at writing including the Gospel of Mark (Luke 1:1-4)” [ATR].

Since the Scripture does not tell us, it would only be speculation on our part if postulated that The Lord delayed the transfer of Paul to allow time to prepare Luke to write the Gospel According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. At the same time, it seems completely logical to conclude that Luke saw the delay and took advantage of the opportunity to return to Jerusalem, and possibly to Galilee to carefully retrace the steps of Jesus, interview His family and followers, collect stories, and make notes necessary to write the Third Gospel and the one Book of History in the New Testament. It has been my conviction for many years that Philip was led to settle in Caesarea for a greater purpose than working with one local congregation. I am convinced that Philip and his four daughters who prophesied were among the friends who ministered to Paul during his two years imprisonment. It also seems likely that Luke was a welcomed guest in their home. Philip may well have a valuable source for Luke as he researched the life of Christ.

I often stress that the Bible is the product of the mind of the Holy Spirit. It is God breathed. It is truth without any mixture of error. At the same time, both Luke tells us that he researched everything of which he wrote, and John tells us that he was an eye witness to the things of which he wrote.

As man reasons, we can think of no greater waste than to take the most brilliant theologian who ever lived and lock him up for two years. But we have to remember that our ways are not God's ways and our thoughts are not His thoughts (Is. 55:8-9). No time surrendered to God is wasted. When John was exiled to Patmos, many must have thought, “What a waste to have the lone surviving apostle

living in exile where he could not teach the people.” Then one day they went to the post office, opened the mail box and pulled out The Revelation! The aging apostle might have continued to teach local believers, and even other congregations for a few more years, but The Revelation has been speaking to millions for two thousand years, and will continue to speak to Christians until Jesus returns.

**PORCIUS FESTUS.** Luke tells us that “After two years, Felix was replaced as governor by Festus.” Felix, who might have freed Paul at any time, kept him in prison for two years and when he left he left Paul in prison to please the Jews. “This was a long time for Paul to be inactive. During this period he was in constant written communication with the churches, and some scholars even think that he supervised Luke’s writing of the Acts” [NCWB]. I would say that the Holy Spirit supervised the writing of Acts, but Paul would certainly have made a contribution.

Felix was recalled to Rome in A. D. 59, and Porcius Festus replaced him as governor. We know very little about Felix, and what we do know is not especially good. It is doubtful that he was as corrupt as Felix. We are not told that he was obsessed with plans to elicit a bribe from Paul, yet pleasing the Jews took precedence over justice for Paul.

Some believe “Felix eventually lost his position because he was cruelly intemperate in putting down a Jewish and Gentile conflict in Caesarea” [BKC]. Others write that he may have died in office. Whichever is the case, he was in a position to release Paul but he refused to do so. Like Felix, he wanted to keep the Jewish leaders happy. That way he might have hoped to keep them out of his hair for some time.

## Chapter 25

### Paul Appeals to Caesar

**25:1 - UP TO JERUSALEM.** “*Three days after Festus arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.*” One writer notes here that “This section (vv. 1-12) is crucial because in it Paul appealed to Caesar. It sets the direction for the remainder of the book and also shows how the apostle reached Rome” [BKC]. It is only conjecture on my part, but it seems reasonable to me that Festus would have received some kind of orientation before moving to Caesarea to replace Felix as governor. In which case, he would have known that the key to a peaceful tenure as governor in this province was to keep the high priest, the chief priests, and members of the Sanhedrin happy. They had been given authority to deal with religious issues, both in the Holy Land and in other provinces they could normally be counted on to keep the peace. After all, they had given Saul of

Tarsus a letter authorizing him to take the persecution of the church to Damascus.

“Three days” hardly gave Festus time to unpack, but he was anxious to visit Jerusalem. “He wanted to become familiar with the main city of his government as soon as possible. Festus, generally regarded as more honest than Felix, ruled from a.d. 59 until his death in a.d. 62” [NCWB]. He, no doubt, visited the Roman commander, and perhaps reviewed the Roman troops while he was there. He met with the high priest, chief priests, various elders, if not the full Sanhedrin.

**25:2 - PRESENTED THEIR CASE.** *“Then the chief priests and the leaders of the Jews presented their case against Paul to him; and they appealed...”* As we have seen in the previous verse, Festus had been on the job as governor over the province only three days before he left the capitol in Caesarea and traveled to Jerusalem, some seventy miles away. The journey was uphill all the way, climbing from sea level to an altitude of around 2700 - 2800 feet above sea level. He obviously felt that it was important for him to meet with the high priest and elders of the Jews. Rome had absolute power over the Jews, but they understood how to play the political game to keep pressure on the officials who ruled over them. They could send letters to Caesar accusing the governor or the local commander of malfeasance in office, ignoring an insurrectionist, or some other action for which the emperor might have the official investigated. They could keep the pressure on the man who ruled over them. Remember that Nero was Caesar at this time, and the governor knew that he was volatile, violent, and unpredictable. This was just the right combination to motivate local officials to avoid trouble with these Jews.

There was one high priest and a number of men referred to as chief priests, probably priests connected with the family of the high priest, or those who would have previously served as high priest. The “leaders of the Jews” were probably the chief priests, elders, and all the members of the Sanhedrin, which I like to think of as the Supreme Court of the Jews in all matters effecting their religion.

Festus knew enough about these Jews and their leaders to want to get off to a good start with them. The High priests and chief priests were ready to take advantage of their opportunity. They had failed in their effort to get Felix to condemn Paul to death, so they present their charges before the new governor. Such was their hatred for Paul that they had not forgotten their encounter of two years earlier with him. The Jews had tried to kill him after Jews from Ephesus had accused him of bringing Gentiles into the temple complex. After he had been rescued by Claudius Lysias, and after his troops had been forced to carry Paul up the steps to the Tower of Antonia, he had asked for and been given permission to speak to them. He proclaimed the Gospel to them, but for them, it was like rubbing salt into the wounds of their spirit. When the commander had ordered the Sanhedrin to meet to deal with him, Paul had brought up the resurrection again and that had led to another riot from which he had to be rescued again by Claudius Lysias. There had then been a plot by would-be assassins which involved a request from the Sanhedrin to have Paul brought back for another hearing, only he was to have been ambushed on the way to that forum. He had been sent under heavy guard by night to Caesarea, but five days later they were standing with their Roman lawyer bringing charges against Paul and seeking nothing less than his death.

That had been two years. How could anyone keep the flames of hatred fanned that long? They hated Paul intensely because they had hated Jesus and they had hated everything associated with him. Two years had not tempered their hatred in the least. They had evidence of Paul's success on three missionary journeys and they wanted to stop this movement which they called The Way once and for all time. They also remembered their own failure in their effort to have Paul put to death two years earlier.

**NOTE:** See special note # 2 at the end of this volume.

There is one other factor. Their case against Paul had not been convincing two years earlier and they had no better evidence now. They had to come up with some other plan.

**25:3 - A FAVOR.** *“(A)sking him to do them a favor against Paul, that he might summon him to Jerusalem. They were preparing an ambush along the road to kill him.”* They did not have evidence that would stand up in court, so they had to resort to asking a favor of a Roman governor, whom they detested (he was a Gentile and he ruled over Israel). If one of these elders had been on his way to Jerusalem for Passover and even the shadow of Festus had fallen across him, he would have been declared ceremonially unclean and would have had to be ceremonially cleansed before he could participate in Passover.

They had failed before Felix in Caesarea, so they ask Festus, as a favor, to bring Paul back to Jerusalem so they might present their charges against him before another governor. This was a two day trip.

**AN AMBUSH.** “They were preparing an ambush along the road to kill him.” Their hatred had not abated in the least in the two years since they had tried to kill him, not just once but two or three times. They were still willing to ambush, or have him ambushed while he was being escorted by Roman guards. Such an act might have been viewed as an insurrection, and an insurrection might have led Rome to invade Israel with an overwhelming force. They already had an adequate force on hand in Jerusalem and in Caesarea, but they might have sent thousands of armed men against them. There might have been a blood-bath of the kind that was only ten or eleven years away. Titus would finally become fed up with them and invade the land, place Jerusalem under siege, break down the walls and destroy the temple, just as Jesus had prophesied.

It is hard for the average Christian to comprehend such hatred, but it is common in some Islamic nations today, among insurgents in various nations in the Middle East, and among sleeper cells in Europe and America. We must remember, however, to distinguish between the kind of religious hatred we see here and the kind of hatred manifested by Islamic extremists. One cannot imagine Israeli today deliberately bombing women and children, whereas radical Muslim groups target them. Those religious leaders want Paul dead, because of his success in persuading Jews in various countries that Jesus is the Messiah, because of his ministry from prison in Caesarea, and his potential influence in the future if released. They had to know that neither their charges nor a Roman prison

had stopped Paul from proclaiming the Gospel.

**SPECIAL NOTE: See Chapter Note # 2 at the end of this volume.**

**25:4 - FESTUS ANSWERED.** *“However, Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was about to go there shortly.”* Festus had made the first gesture toward a working relationship with these Jews by coming so quickly to Jerusalem. He had shown a willingness to hear their charges, so they press him to do them a favor and bring Paul to Jerusalem. Though it was only conjecture on his part, Robertson suggests that “They probably argued that it was easier for one man (Paul) to come to Jerusalem than for many to go down there” [ATR]. He continues by adding, “But Festus was clearly suspicious (verse Acts 25:6) and was wholly within his rights to insist that they make their charges in Caesarea where he held court” [ATR].

There is no basis for either suggestion, but who am I to argue with A. T. Robertson?! However, the first suggestion seems to have more merit: it does seem logical that it would be easier for one man to go to Jerusalem than for a large number of them to go to Caesarea, but that one man would not be traveling alone. Seventy cavalry men had escorted Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea, and 400 more soldiers had gone with them as far as Antipatris. There may be more basis for the second suggestion, but the new Governor needed to go back to Caesarea and probably could care less if these people were inconvenienced. At the same time, he may have known about the earlier plan to ambush Paul and kill him. He stated that Paul would be kept at Caesarea, since he was returning there shortly.

**25:5 - LET MEN OF AUTHORITY.** *“Therefore,” he said, “let the men of authority among you go down with me and accuse him, if there is any wrong in this man.”* The religious leaders had suggested a plan, which of course would have meant that they had met privately apart from Festus. Now, he tells them what they might do. “The men of authority” denotes “The mighty ones among you,” ‘the men of power’ (dunatoi) and authority, ‘the first men,’ the Sanhedrin, in other words. **Note change here by Luke from indirect discourse in verse Acts 25:4, to direct in verse Acts 25:5** (phêsin, says he)” [ATR, bold added by this writer]. This was not open to debate. If they had genuine charges against Paul they could present them in his court in Caesarea. It seems that he is not convinced. After all, he knew that Felix had heard the charges and had not condemned Paul.

**25:6 - DOWN TO CAESAREA.** *“When he had spent not more than eight or 10 days among them, he went down to Caesarea. The next day, seated at the judge’s bench, he commanded Paul to be brought in.”* Interestingly, Luke says that he spent “not more than eight of 10 days” in Jerusalem before going to Caesarea. Today, Americans say “up north” or “down south”, but Jews traveling to Jerusalem went “up to Jerusalem” and anyone leaving that city went “down from Jerusalem”. In the first place, one a steep climb going up to Jerusalem and he likewise steep descent when he left, so geographically, one was going down from Jerusalem. However, when the Jew spoke of going up to Jerusalem, there was a spiritual significance associated with it. Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, may have had both ideas in mind.

It is also of interest that Luke is not specific as to the number of days continued among them before

leaving for his headquarters. Since he is more specific at times, it would seem that it was not of primary importance.

**HE COMMANDED PAUL.** The next day, the first day after his arrival back in Caesarea, Festus sent for Paul. There is no doubt that Paul was the one prisoner Felix, the former governor, would never forget. Festus may not have lived too long after this encounter, but if he had lived to be one hundred, he would never have forgotten this prisoner. It would also be interesting to know what was going on in the governor's mind after the charges made against Paul by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. As already mentioned, he had to know something of the hearings before Felix over the past two years.

**25:7 - THE JEWS.** *“When he arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him and brought many serious charges that they were not able to prove...”* These Jews would be the same Jewish elders who had made the charges against Paul in Jerusalem, and appealed to Festus to bring the prisoner to Jerusalem to answer the charges. They well know that their charges would not stand up in court, and they planned to ambush him on the way. They were no better than the assassins who had vowed to murder Paul two years earlier. In fact, they were in on the earlier plot. And these were the spiritual leaders of all Israelites!

The high priests and elders of the Jews had hired a Roman attorney to present the charges before Felix two years earlier but now they make the charges themselves. They had charged Paul with being an international pest, stirring up insurrection among the Jews, and desecrating the temple. The charges they make against him were probably the same as those Tertullus had made before Felix.

**MANY SERIOUS CHARGES.** The charges were indeed serious, had there been any basis for them. “Luke added, however, that the charges were many and serious” [BKC]. Luke also reveals that they were unable to prove the charges.

Before I was born, my own grandfather was accused of conspiring with others to commit a horrific crime. A man took the stand and, with his hand on the Bible, swore to tell the truth. He made the statement that he had heard my grandfather make the statement that he would not have anything to do with the act, but he had plenty of money for the ones who did. When he was dismissed from the witness stand, he walked right by my grandfather, paused and said in a low voice, “Lee, I have told my last (expletive ) lie on you.” It was two years before my grandfather was cleared of those charges. I could hardly believe it years later when I was working for the Quitman County, Mississippi, ASCS (a division of the USDA) and I stopped by the office and picked up my assignments and looked down and saw that man's name on a form. I had assumed the man was dead, but found that he was very much alive, and living in our area. My mother was surprised when I told her I had worked that man's farm that day. This all happened before I was born and I had no feelings of animosity toward the man, who was now an elderly man farming a very small place. Since it was my maternal grandfather against whom he had lied, my name meant nothing to him.

**25:8 - PAUL MADE THE DEFENSE.** *“(W)hile Paul made the defense that, ‘Neither against*

*the Jewish law, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I sinned at all.*” “None of these political and religious accusations were based on any evidence. Paul’s reply was a brief denial and a challenge to prove any of these charges” [NCWB]. Paul would have made a good lawyer. I might add that there are lawyers who spend most of their career dealing with cases in which they do research and file papers. Some of those make an effort to settle cases out of court. There are others who love trial work. My brother is one who loves trial work and has successfully defended many people and companies. It is hard to imagine anyone being better prepared going into a trial than he, but after the preparation, the attorney must be able to present the case effectively. My older son John has been a prosecutor for a number of years and I have learned a little about the law and about lawyers from them.

I am sure Paul would have chosen to avoid another trial, but when he presented his defense, he did so masterfully. The Lord had promised that He would be with his servants and give them the words to say when they were dragged before judges. That He remembered that promise is evident here. Paul organizes the charges into three categories and refutes each one. (1) He had broken no Jewish law (not that this would normally concern the Roman governor); (2) he had not desecrated the temple (he had honored the temple by participating in the vow); and (3) he had broken no Roman law (law of Caesar). He may well have pointed out the fact that his accusers had presented no evidence for any of their charges.

**CAESAR.** As noted above, Paul organized the charges made by the Jewish elders under three divisions, Jewish law, the temple, Roman law (Caesar).

“This last was the one that would interest Festus and, if proved, would render Paul guilty of treason (*majestas*). Nero was Emperor A.D. 54-68, the last of the emperors with any hereditary claim to the name "Caesar." Soon it became merely a title like Kaiser and Czar (modern derivatives). In Acts only "Caesar" and "Augustus" are employed for the Emperor, not "King" (*Basileus*) as from the time of Domitian. Paul's denial is complete and no proof had been presented. Luke was apparently present at the trial” [ATR].

**25:9 - WANTING OT DO A FAVOR.** “*Then Festus, wanting to do a favor for the Jews, replied to Paul, ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem, there to be tried before me on these charges?’*” Paul briefly, emphatically, and categorically denied all the charges. Then “Festus asked the prisoner if he would be willing to go... to Jerusalem for another trial. Festus had changed his mind on this (cf. vv. 4-5), apparently feeling this would be a suitable compromise to placate the Jews. Also he was realizing he did not know how to handle this kind of religious case (v. 20)” [BKC].

Festus is as much aware of the problems those Jewish leaders could create for their Roman governor as Felix had been. In any serious confrontation he had the authority to impose his will on them, but they could bring pressure to bear on him from Caesar if he failed cover all the bases, so it must have seemed expedient to try to appease them as far

as possible. It is doubtful that subjects in any other nation were any more intuitive, imaginative, and bold as these Jewish elders. Festus wanted to keep them happy. They were driven by a passionate zeal for their race and their religion.

**ARE YOU WILLING.** Festus knew he had no grounds for forcing Paul to go to Jerusalem, so he asks him if he is willing to go. After two years of hearing before Felix and the charges made against him by the elders before Festus in Jerusalem, and once again here in Caesarea, such a proposition must have been frustrating to Paul. Barnes summarizes the situation clearly:

“Had he been disposed to do right at once, he would have immediately discharged Paul. Festus perceived that the case was one that did not come fairly within the jurisdiction of a Roman magistrate; that it pertained solely to the customs and questions among the Jews, (Acts 25:18-20;) and he therefore proposed that the case should be tried before him at Jerusalem. It is remarkable, however, that he had such a sense of justice, and law, as not to suffer the case to go out of his own hands. He proposed still to hear the cause, but asked Paul whether he was willing that it should be tried at Jerusalem? As the question which he asked Paul was one on which he was at liberty to take his own course, and as Paul had no reason to expect that his going to Jerusalem would facilitate the cause of justice, it is not remarkable that he declined the offer, as perhaps Festus supposed he would” [BARNES].

**25:10 - I STAND AT CAESAR’S TRIBUNAL.** *“But Paul said: “I am standing at Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as even you can see very well.”* Paul had finally had enough. He was obviously sick of the political games going on between the Roman governors in Caesarea and the Jewish elders. He was tired of being treated like a political football. At least, with the governor it was political. The high priest and elders were playing a political game with Festus, even though their primary interests were supposed to be religious.

**WHERE I OUGHT TO BE TRIED.** He was a Roman citizen who had been taken under the umbrella of the Roman military to escape an ambush in Jerusalem. Now, Festus would send him back to Jerusalem, knowing that the charges against him were bogus. As a Roman citizen, he declares that this is the court where the issue should be settled, and should have been had there been, since there was no evidence. He boldly exclaims that this is where he “ought to be tried.”

“Every procurator represented the person of the emperor in the province over which he presided; and, as the seat of government was at Caesarea, and Paul was now before the tribunal on which the emperor's representative sat, he could say, with the strictest propriety, that he stood before Caesar's judgment seat, where, as a freeman of Rome, he should be tried” [CLARKE].

Then, Paul boldly adds, “I have done no wrong to the Jews, as even you can see very well.”

Robertson explains Paul's argument:

“As thou also very well knowest (hôs kai su kallion epiginôskeis). "As thou also dost understand (hast additional knowledge, epiginôskeis) better" (than thou art willing to admit). That this is Paul's meaning by the use of the comparative kallion (positive kalôs) is made plain by the confession of Festus to Agrippa in verse Acts 25:18. Paul says that Festus knows that he has done no wrong to the Jews at all (ouden êdikêka) and yet he is trying to turn him over to the wrath of the Jews in Jerusalem” [ATR].

**25:11 - IF THEN I AM DOING WRONG.** *“If then I am doing wrong, or have done anything deserving of death, I do not refuse to die, but if there is nothing to what these men accuse me of, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar!”* Paul may well have known that to return to Jerusalem, even after two years would expose him to the same assassins. He declares that if he had done anything deserving death he was ready to die. However, since there was no basis for the charges, **“no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.”** He was a Roman citizen and he knew Roman law.

**I APPEAL TO CAESAR!** He had been patient long enough. Festus could not force him to go back to Jerusalem, but he might keep him in prison another two years without any evidence, as Felix had. He seems to be saying, enough is enough! **“I appeal to Caesar!”** You can believe that was the last thing anyone in that court room expected to hear that day. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible, New Testament summarizes it like this:

“Paul insisted that he was already standing before the proper judge, since Festus was the emperor's representative. Festus's proposal was to turn him over to the Sanhedrin for judgment (25:11) with a promise of protection, but Paul would have been killed as soon as he arrived in Jerusalem, no matter how strong the protection. He thus called upon Festus to remember his innocence. **I appeal unto Caesar**—Every Roman citizen had the right of appeal to the highest ruler. Paul used this power since the alternative was to be killed by an angry mob of Jews” [NCWB].

**25:12 - AFTER FESTUS CONFERRED.** *“After Festus conferred with his council, he replied, ‘You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go!’* Before handing down his decision, Festus conferred with his Roman council, experts in Roman law. After which, he said, ‘You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go!’”

“There is some debate as to whether **Festus** was legally bound to remand the case **to Caesar** (Nero, who reigned from a.d. 54-68), or if he could have chosen to handle the case himself. If Festus had decided to hear the case and made a negative decision, Paul could still have appealed to Caesar. But Festus probably had no alternative but to transfer the case to Rome. So after he **had conferred with his council**, he announced that in view of Paul's

appeal, he must go to **Caesar**” [BKC].

## King Agrippa Visit Festus

I recently saw a pastor I have known for a number of years at St. Francis Hospital in Monroe, Louisiana. We talked for a few minutes and I mentioned this study in Acts. He said, “Acts. That is my favorite book in the Bible.” Acts is certainly one of my favorite books in the Bible, but I have a confession: Whatever book I am working on is likely to be my favorite book at that time. When I was preparing a series of sermons from Jeremiah, I was completely caught up in that book. I love Romans, and I love the Gospels. The Gospel According to John may well be my favorite book in the Bible. Act, however, will always be right at the top of the list. This passage is one of the reasons. I don’t know how many sermons I have heard on this text. As a matter of fact, I have preached on it a number of times myself. This passage is one reason I love this book

**25:13 - AFTER SOME DAYS.** *“After some days had passed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea and paid a courtesy call on Festus.”* Paul, after having been rescued from a mob in Jerusalem by the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias, had been placed in custody and imprisoned. He had appeared before the Sanhedrin, from which forum Lysias had been forced to rescue him again. Learning of a plot by would-be assassins to ambush Paul, Claudius Lysias had him rushed out of Jerusalem under heavy guard and had him taken to Caesarea. A few days later, the high priest and elders of the Jews appeared with their hired Roman lawyer before then governor Felix to present their charges.

Paul, in his defense, decisively pointed out that they had no evidence against him. That notwithstanding, Felix had kept him in prison for two years, calling him often to try to elicit a bribe. Finally, when Felix was replaced as governor by Festus, Paul must have hoped he would be released. Instead, the high priest and his henchmen had launched a fresh attack, warmed over the same old charges, and presented them before a new governor. Festus could see that there was no basis for the charges, but to try to please the Jews, he asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem for another hearing there. Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen and appealed to Rome. It was now set. He was going to Rome.

He had planned to go to Rome when he wrote the Epistle to the church at Rome over two years earlier. His plans were spelled out in that letter and affirmed by Jesus Himself at a later date:

“But now I no longer have any work to do in these provinces, and **I have strongly desired for many years to come to you whenever I travel to Spain.** For I do hope to see you when I pass through, and to be sent on my way there by you, once I have first enjoyed your company for a while. **Now, however, I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.** Yes, they were pleased, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to Jews in material needs. So when I

have finished this and safely delivered the funds to them, **I will go by way of you to Spain.** 2But I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

“Now **I implore you**, brothers, through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, **to agonize together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf: that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea**, that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, and that, by God’s will, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed together with you” (Rom. 15:23-32, bold added by this writer).

Why had Paul planned to go to Rome and on to Spain? We do not have to speculate on that question because he answers it for us: “So **my aim is to evangelize where Christ has not been named**, in order that I will not be building on someone else’s foundation, but, as it is written: Those who had no report of Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.” (Rom. 15:20-21, bold added by this writer).

Paul knew he was going to Rome and now after two long years of imprisonment and hearing before a corrupt judge he had appealed to Rome, and to Rome he was going! His time had not been wasted while he was in Caesarea, not had Luke wasted his time. Now, the time had come to for him to go to Rome. That, however, presented Festus with a sticky problem and he saw a ray of home with the visit of King Agrippa.

**KING AGRIPPA.** I consulted a number of sources for information on King Agrippa and found, not surprisingly, that they all said basically the same thing. Robertson offers that information without so many references to Josephus as some of the others, so his comments are presented here:

“Agrippa II son of Agrippa I of Acts 12:20-23. On the death of Herod King of Chalcis A.D. 48, Claudius A.D. 50 gave this Herod Agrippa II the throne of Chalcis so that Luke is correct in calling him king, though he is not king of Judea. But he was also given by Claudius the government of the temple and the right of appointing the high priest. Later he was given also the tetrarchies of Philip and Lysanias. He was the last Jewish king in Palestine, though not king of Judea. He angered the Jews by building his palace so as to overlook the temple and by frequent changes in the high priesthood. He made his capital at Caesarea Philippi which he called Neronias in honour of Nero. Titus visited it after the fall of Jerusalem” [ATR].

**BERNICE.** This was the sister of King Agrippa. “She married her uncle Herod, the king of Chalcis. When he died, she came to live with her brother, Agrippa II, and probably had an incestuous relationship with him” [NCWB].

**A COURTESY CALL.** His responsibilities in Jerusalem and his authority to appoint the high priest mean that Agrippa and Festus would be working together. This was,

as Luke says, simply a courtesy call.

**25:14 - PAUL'S CASE.** *“Since they stayed there many days, Festus presented Paul's case to the king, saying, ‘There's a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix.’”* It was probably customary in the Emperor's province governors and kings to call on each other, and the times and circumstances would have made long visits a custom. Since King Agrippa was going to be in Caesarea for “many days” Festus presented Paul's case to him. His motive might have been simply a shared interest in the politics in the area. However, this must have been a unique case for both Festus and Agrippa. Remember that Festus was going to have to send Paul Rome and he had to write a letter in which he must spell out the charges against him. He may well have been looking for some help in this from someone in authority who better understood the Jews than he did. As a matter of fact, when the hearing began Festus openly admitted that he needed help with the letter. After all, he was sending this letter to Nero and that alone would cause a great deal of anxiety. Any help from King Agrippa would be appreciated. **Many who do not like to share credit do not hesitate to share responsibility for failure**, and both Felix and Festus had failed to administer Roman justice.

**25:15 - IN JERUSALEM.** *“When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews presented their case and asked for a judgment against him.”* Festus offers a brief account of the events that had left him with a Roman citizen he had to send to Rome as a prisoner without any charges to justify his imprisonment in the first place. It is amazing that two years and not been enough time for the chief priests and elder to moderate their intense anger and hatred for this particular prisoner. Religious feeds upon itself, as we see every time a Muslim spews hatred for Christians today because of the Crusades that happened hundreds of years ago. Little do they remember that the followers of Mohammed were the initial aggressors, and that they were determined to conquer Europe in the name of their false god.

Paul had been the most outstanding student of Gamaliel's students many years earlier. There is every reason to assume that some of his fellow students were now among those elders who wanted to kill him. Religious hatred can be a fearsome, and unexplainable force, as illustrated today by the hatred of Islamic extremists for Christians and Jews. These chief priests and elders had pressed Festus for “a judgment against him.” He wanted to please them and there was one thing he could do to please them: serve up Paul's head on a platter! Or better yet, give them an opportunity and they would kill him. Festus must certainly have perceived the deep hatred these people had for Paul. “Nothing could satisfy these men but the death of the apostle. It was not justice they wanted, but his destruction” [CLARKE].

When we consider the state of Judaism at the time we can understand Jesus' lament, ““Jerusalem, Jerusalem! The city who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, yet you were not willing!” (Matt 23:37). These were the leaders of Judaism who had killed the Messiah and set Israel on a course that would harden them against the Lord until Jesus returns. It is ironic that the leaders of Israel at that time were intent on destroying Christianity, but today Israel has looked to Christians to influence America to protect and defend Israel. They may hate Jesus, but there would be no state

of Israel without Christians. The Lord promises to bless those who bless Israel, and a Christian America made a commitment to Israel. No, America was never a theocracy (as enemies of the Cross love to shout) but it was established on Christian principles. David Barton of *WallBuilders* provides irrefutable proof of that through his books and his website.

**25:16 - I ANSWERED THEM.** *“I answered them that it’s not the Romans’ custom to give any man up before the accused confronts the accusers face to face and has an opportunity to give a defense concerning the charge.”* Festus is fairly consistent with the facts in relating his answer to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. This is certainly the answer he would want Rome to hear, so this is a good rehearsal for him. Rome boasted of justice in its courts and it had taught and imposed its form of justice on all nations it had conquered. Every governor and every king over a province in the Roman Empire understood the value Rome placed on Roman justice throughout the world they controlled.

Festus gives Agrippa the reasons he had given to the Jews for not delivering Paul into their hands, which is what they really wanted. Many students of the Word sense from reading this that Festus held the Jews in contempt. I would not be surprised if they are right.

‘In Acts 25:4,5, we have an account of the fact that he would not accede to the requests of the Jews; and he here states that the reason of his refusal was, that it was contrary to the Roman law. Appian, in his Roman history, says, "It is not their custom to condemn men before they are heard." Philo de Preesi. Rom. says the same thing. In Tacitus (Annul. ii.) it is said, "A defendant is not to be prohibited from adducing all things, by which his innocence may be established." It was for this that the equity of the Roman jurisprudence was celebrated throughout the world” [BARNES].

American Justice mirrors certain aspects of Roman Justice. We may have refined it (and at times even compromised it) through the years, but it is still the right of an individual to face his accusers. Our laws are just, unless they are distorted and the accused is denied his rights.

**25:17 - WHEN THEY HAD ASSEMBLED.** *“Therefore, when they had assembled here, I did not delay. The next day I sat at the judge’s bench and ordered the man to be brought in.”* Festus, governor of the province, continues to explain the circumstances which had produced a rather sticky problem for him. He is giving his “edited” version, but sticks with the basic facts, which he has no doubt gone over in his mind as he prepares to write his letter to Rome stating the charges against Paul. The simple fact is that he is holding a Roman citizen as a prisoner without any charges and he going to have to write a letter to Caesar explaining why he is being sent to Rome. The prisoner has appealed to Rome and Festus has ruled that he must go to Rome. This prisoner had stood trial before Felix two years earlier, and he had stood before Felix many times during his two year imprisonment. Now he stands before Festus, the new governor.

Festus outlines the case for King Agrippa, without mentioning the fact that Paul should have been exonerated two years earlier following the first trial before Felix. Three days after he arrived in

Caesarea as governor, he had gone to Jerusalem where the high priest and other Jewish leaders had bombarded him with charges against Paul. They tried to persuade him to bring Paul to Jerusalem in order to have assassins ambush him and kill him. Instead, he returned to Caesarea after a few more days. The Jewish leaders may must have followed him when he left Jerusalem since they assembled before him the day after his return. Then Festus ordered “the man to be brought in.”

**SPECIAL NOTE:** This writer is fully aware of repetition in this study. In fact, it serves the purpose of The Bible Notebook in that it provides pertinent information for the reader so that he or she may not have to leave a passage like this in order to search for additional information on the passage. Running references can, and often is beneficial. However, in certain studies, it breaks the train of thought to have to have to continually search for the information one needs.

**25:18 - NO CHARGE.** “Concerning him, the accusers stood up and brought no charge of the sort I was expecting.” This is interesting because they had made all these charges against Paul in Jerusalem. He probably means that those charges were not formally presented in a court of law there. These were extremely zealous charges made during a personal, but informal meeting with him when he received the high priest and elders in Jerusalem.

**I WAS EXPECTING.** Robertson translates it, “Of such evil things as I supposed” and added the note: “Note the imperfect active hupenooun of huponoœō to emphasize Festus's state of mind about Paul before the trial” [ATR]. Why would he have been expecting serious charges against Paul if he had heard the same charges in Jerusalem? It is possible that he had heard all their bitter charges against Paul in Jerusalem and invited them to come to Caesarea to present them formally under the impression that they had proof of the charges. However, when they presented their charges formally he realized they had no case at all.

**25:19 - SOME DISAGREEMENT WITH HIM.** “Instead they had some disagreements with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, preposterous dead man whom Paul claimed to be alive.” Festus reviews the circumstance of the trial for King Agrippa in such a way as to show his commitment to justice in his court. He may have been making this statement to emphasize to Agrippa that he had heard accusations against the Paul in an informal setting in Jerusalem, but then in a formal setting he had given them an opportunity to present their charges officially. Instead of presenting a case and supporting it with any evidence, what Festus heard was an argument over their religious differences “about a certain Jesus, a dead man whom Paul claimed to be alive.”

Don Antley is chairman of our deacon body and he teaches young adults in Sunday School. He is also my friend, the kind of friend a pastors needs if he is to be effective in his local ministry. Don recently asked me an interesting question: “We look at the pagan religions of the world and they seem so ridiculous to us. Do you ever wonder what they see when they look at us?” The first thing I thought of was what they must think of Christians when they discover that we worship One who died for the sins of the world and then arose from the dead on the third day. No less a theologian than former Louisiana Edwin Edwards, now serving time in a federal prison, made the statement a

number of years ago that Jesus was not really dead. He merely swooned and when they put him in the cool tomb he “revived”. That opinion was not original with the former governor, but it does reflect disbelief in the literal resurrection of Jesus. If Edwin Edwards, who often spoke in churches when he was campaigning, found the story of the resurrection of Jesus preposterous, what more could we expect of a pagan Roman governor?

It is interesting that man in his wisdom might reject the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but find no problem with reincarnation. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul has a lot to say about the resurrection. In Romans, He stresses that no one can be saved who does not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ: **“if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.** With the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10, bold added).

**25:20 - TO JERUSALEM.** *“Since I was at a loss in a dispute over such things, I asked him if he wished to go to Jerusalem and be tried there concerning these matters.”* Festus continues to represent himself in the best possible light. He had to know something about Paul’s trial before Felix, his predecessor, before whom the Roman lawyer Tertullus had presented the case against the prisoner. He had heard the charges in Jerusalem. He would have been rather negligent if he had not reviewed the case, and he would have been foolish not to have seen through the charges in Jerusalem, and again in his formal court. The real issue was not that he “was at a loss”, but that he wanted to please the Jews. He had authority over them, but they would not hesitate to send letters to Caesar accusing him of malfeasance if he did not please them. Furthermore, Festus would have been keenly aware of the fact that the Emperor would be reading the letter was none other than Nero!

So, what does a good politician do? He seeks a compromise that serves his own personal interests. Not doubt, it was with his own personal interest in mind that he asked Paul if “he wished to go to Jerusalem and be tried there concerning these matters.” Did he ask that question believing Paul was foolish enough to choose to go to Jerusalem where he would be heard in the most hostile environment imaginable? Or was Festus simply trying to please the Jews. The latter seems more likely.

**25:21 - BUT PAUL APPEALED.** *“But when Paul appealed to be held for trial by the Emperor, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I could send him to Caesar.”* Paul threw them all a curve by appealing to the Emperor. It is very doubtful that anyone in court that day expected Paul exercise his rights as a Roman citizen and appeal to Caesar. Why had he not done so earlier? The only answer I can come up with is that the Holy Spirit was in control of the circumstances and He had been using him in Caesarea. Now, however, it is time for him to go to Rome, as Jesus had promised. Festus informs Agrippa that he had ordered him kept in custody until arrangements could be made to send Paul to Caesar. Here, “Caesar” is used as the title of Nero instead of “Augustus”. Barnes explains:

“The reigning emperor at this time was Nero. The name

Augustus--sebastou--properly denotes that which is venerable, or worthy of honour and reverence. It was first applied to Caesar Octavianus, who was the Roman emperor in the time when our Saviour was born, and who is usually called Augustus Caesar. But the title continued to be used of his successors in office, as denoting the veneration or reverence which was due to the rank of emperor" [BARNES].

**25:22 - AGRIPPA SAID.** *"Then Agrippa said to Festus, 'I would like to hear the man myself.' 'Tomorrow,' he said, 'you will hear him.'"* No doubt Agrippa had heard about Jesus, and possibly about Paul. He had certainly heard about the Christian movement. "The rehearsal of the situation had its desired effect on **Agrippa**. The Herodian family was useful to Rome for its knowledge of Jewish affairs and Agrippa's insights would be helpful to Festus" [BKC]. Robertson captures the spirit of Agrippa's response:

"The imperfect for courtesy, rather than the blunt *boulomai*, I wish, I want. Literally, "I myself also was wishing" (while you were talking), a compliment to the interesting story told by Festus. The use of an with the imperfect would really mean that he does not wish (a conclusion of the second class condition, determined as unfulfilled). An with the optative would show only a languid desire. The imperfect is keen enough and yet polite enough to leave the decision with Festus if inconvenient for any reason (Robertson, Grammar, pp. 885-7)". Agrippa may have heard much about Christianity" [ATR].

## Paul Appears Before Agrippa

**25:23 - THE NEXT DAY.** *"So the next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the auditorium with the commanders and prominent men of the city. When Festus gave the command, Paul was brought in."* Festus may have been (1) seriously seeking Agrippa's opinion and guidance in this case; (2) he may have simply been entertaining the king and his wife; (3) or he may have been thinking first and foremost about the report he had to send to Rome and thought it might help to write that he had consulted with King Agrippa who understood the Jewish religion better than he. We will see later that this is a primary factor. This verse seems to tell us why King Agrippa wanted to hear Paul himself. He may have wanted to help Festus with the case by offering expert opinion, or he may have agreed to please his host. However, when Agrippa and Bernice entered the hall that served as a court room, they knew the "commanders and prominent men of the city would be there", and they entered with great pomp and ceremony. This was the best exhibition hall in the province and they were taking advantage of it. They may have been intrigued by Paul's case, but they were absolutely consumed with their own importance.

**COMMANDERS AND PROMINENT MEN.** Commanders, like Claudius Lysias in Jerusalem, were high ranking Roman officers, and there were probably several commanders present. Festus probably summoned them because he wanted to impress King Agrippa. The "prominent

men” were leading business men, and possibly some politicians or bureaucrats, since Caesarea was headquarters for the entire province.

**PAUL WAS BROUGHT IN.** The stage was set. The only thing missing was the prisoner, so Festus commanded soldiers to bring him to the hall where the governor heard cases and entertained important guests. One wonders how many times had Paul been taken under guard to appear before this bench or chair to report to Felix or Festus. The average prisoner may well have been terrified, but Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, would have been determined to take advantage of the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel before the rulers and prominent men of the city. Remember that Jesus had commissioned Saul of Tarsus to be His witness to Israel, to the Gentiles, and before kings!

Little could these people have realized that they were the ones on trial that day. Paul had already appealed to Caesar and the appeal had been granted. That must have been reassuring as he entered the hall and took his place before the governor, the king, and their wives. However, the real source of courage was the personal assurance of Jesus, who had appeared to him to tell him he was going to Rome. There had been a delay of two years, and that seems like a long time to us, but with the Lord a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. With the Lord this delay was an opportunity for Paul to proclaim the Gospel to Gentile authorities and Jewish leaders from Jerusalem, and to minister to friends and teach believers. There is every reason to believe he was both an inspiration and a source for Luke as he was researching all the events of which he would be inspired to write, or was writing, in the Third Gospel and in the Book of Acts.

One thing that should not be overlooked is the importance of the teaching of sound doctrine. Paul had two years to teach local believers. Think what it must have meant to Philip and other believers there to have Paul teach them the essentials of the Christian faith. I had the privilege of sitting in many meetings with Dr. Jimmy Draper when he was President of LifeWay Christian Resources. I was a trustee the last years of his tenure there and as such I often visited with him, personally or in a group. We were often in committee meetings together. I saw chairman of the nominating committee and we conferred on the placement of new trustees as well as the reassignment of old trustees when that became necessary. Dr. Draper was very effective in committees and in the plenary sessions, and he was a great preacher of the Gospel. He headed up the entity that printed literature one hundred thousand churches, of which only about 45,000 were Southern Baptist churches and missions. Life way had many other ministries, including the LifeWay Christian Stores, and the publication of Bibles and books. A primary ministry of LifeWay is equipping believers to effectively carry out the Great Commission.

Our meetings were long and demanding. On Tuesdays, we met for breakfast at 7:00 A. M. and finished at about 9:00 P.M. It had been a long day, but when Dr. Draper mentioned “Baptist Essentials” he had my full attention. He presented seven essentials, but added that there are many distinctives, but these seven things were essential. I asked for permission to use them and my friend graciously assured me that I could use them in any way they might benefit anyone, so I will include them here:

1. Salvation by grace through faith, plus nothing.
2. The Lordship of Jesus Christ
3. Sufficiency of Scripture
4. Autonomy of the Local Church
5. Religious Liberty
6. Trinitarian view of God (One in essence, three in person)
7. The Great Commission

There are many “distinctives” but these are “essentials.”

The New Testament was far from being complete at this time, so Paul’s instructions for the saints in Caesarea would have been a blessing. If these are indeed, “essentials” of the faith, we can safely assume that Paul would have stressed them to the saints who visited him. Felix had given permission for them to minister to him.

**25:24 - FESTUS SAID.** *“Then Festus said: ‘King Agrippa and all men present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish community has appealed to me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he should not live any longer.’”* As soon as Paul was escorted into the hall where the Roman governor heard both criminal and civil cases, Festus addressed King Agrippa and “the commanders and prominent men of the city” (Vs. 23). He briefly stated the circumstances that had led to this situation. He was of course exaggerating when he claimed that the “whole Jewish community” had appealed to him to put Paul to death. In reality, the high priest, chief priests, and the elders of Judaism tried everything they could think of, both in Jerusalem and at Caesarea, to get him to condemn Paul to death.

Festus may have lacked information about the Jews and their religion, but there was one thing about which he was not mistaken, and that was the fact the they wanted Paul dead. They did not wanted him sentenced to prison, fined, or banished; they wanted him dead. **In the name of God they wanted him killed!** Jesus had warned, **“Then they will hand you over for persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of My name”** (Matt 24:9). When He sent Ananias to lay his hands on Paul so that his eyesight might be restored, he told him that Paul would suffer many things for His sake. He was certainly aware fo the promise Jesus made His followers “don’t fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more” (Luke 12:4).

**25:25 - NOW I REALIZED.** *“Now I realized that he had not done anything deserving of death, but when he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.”* Here, Festus makes the same statement he had made to King agrippa in 25:21. Since it would have been unnecessary to repeat this for Agrippa’s benefit, h. He was probably making this statement for the benefit of the commanders and the prominent citizens assembled there. Paul was innocent, Festus had not freed because he wanted to keep the Jewish leaders happy. Paul had appealed to Caesar and now he was going to have to send him to Rome. **“Festus believed that Agrippa, with his knowledge of Jewish customs and laws, could help Festus write out some charges that would be specific enough for Caesar Nero to consider”** [BKC].

**25:26 - TO WRITE THE EMPEROR.** *“I have nothing definite to write to the Emperor about him. Therefore, I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after this examination is over, I may have something to write.”* What he had not mentioned before is the fact that he could not send him without a written report. He was deeply concerned, not for Paul, but about what to write to the Emperor. The Emperor was Nero, which made what he wrote especially critical. As noted earlier, Festus wanted help with the letter, but he may well have sought to share the responsibility and thereby dilute the attention this letter might draw to the affairs in this province. Festus openly admits that he needs help in finding acceptable charges that might justify his decision to send Paul to Rome. The new governor could not have relished the idea of sending a prisoner to Nero, of all people, without legitimate charges, or without showing that he had done his best to resolve the case. He might have freed Paul but he had blown that opportunity in his effort to please the Jewish leaders.

**25:27 - THE CHARGES.** *“For it seems unreasonable to me to send a prisoner and not to indicate the charges against him.”* It may seem that I have belabored the point about this letter in this section, but now Festus clearly states his dilemma. Festus fully understood that it was “unreasonable” for him to send a prisoner to Rome without stating any serious charges against him. If it seemed unreasonable to Festus, think how unreasonable it would seem to Nero.

**CHAPTER NOTE # 1:** Two interesting terms for Roman royalty are found in this chapter,

“the first of which is *Sebastos* meaning “revered” or “august” and used in the New Testament only in 25:21, 25; 27:1. In chapter 25 it is translated “Emperor” and in 27:1 it is rendered “Imperial.”

“The other term is *kyrios* meaning “lord.” In 25:26 “the lord” is translated **His Majesty**. Both Augustus and Tiberius refused this title for themselves because they felt it exalted them too highly; however, by the time Paul made his appeal to Caesar, Nero was on the throne and “lord” was used much more commonly of the Caesar. Though Nero did accept the title of “lord,” he had not yet gone to the excesses that characterized his reign later. At this juncture Nero was reputed to be a fair-minded ruler” [BKC].

**CHAPTER NOTE # 2:** It is hard to believe that the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the elders of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, would seek so passionately the death of Paul and other Christian leaders. Paul had already written a letter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that helps answer this. Consider this passage from Romans, written by Paul to the church at Rome just before he departed from Corinth for Jerusalem:

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation! **I can testify about them that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.** Because they disregarded the righteousness from God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:1-4).

Let me preface the application here with a few comments about my work on this series in Acts. Much of my time in 2007 was invested in this effort, and it continues in 2008. Sometimes I would cover a verse in an hour, but sometimes I might cover two of three verses in an hour. I have done something I have never known anyone else to do and that is to offer comments on each verse, regardless of how many times Luke mentioned a particular event in other places. I simply did not want to add the “See author’s notes” on an earlier verse. In book form what I have done would be impractical if not impossible, but it is practical in this format, thanks to the computer, the Internet, and to Dr. Mike Minnix, Editor of the PastorLife.Com website for the Georgia Baptist Convention. The reader can still look to other passages on a subject, but it is not always necessary.

Throughout this entire series, covering seven volumes to this point, with one more volume planned, there has been the awareness of how incongruous and contradictory the attitude and actions of the Jewish leaders were toward the followers of Jesus Christ, whose Name they normally avoided saying. They simply referred to Christianity as The Way. Let me point out a few of the atrocities of the Jewish leaders and point out how they, the Jews, “have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” I will mention only a few examples:

1. The Jewish leaders persecuted Peter and John. Why? They had “**zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**”
2. They stoned Stephen? Why? They had “**zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**”
3. They persecuted believers until they were forced to leave Jerusalem. Why? They had “**zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**”
4. They disowned and ostracized family members who became Christians, forcing Christians in other places to send offerings to them. Why? They had “**zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**”
5. They tried to kill Paul in the temple complex. Why? They had “**zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**”
6. They were such a threat in the Sanhedrin that Claudius Lysias had to rescue him. Why? They had “**zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**”

7. They joined with assassins in a plot to ambush Paul. Why? They had **“zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”**

8. They hired a Roman lawyer and tried to have Felix condemn him to death. Why? They had **“zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”**

9. They Tried to get Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem for a trial, when in reality, they planned to ambush him, risking serious consequences. Why? They had **“zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”**

10. They went again to Caesarea and brought various unsubstantiated charges against Paul in an effort to persuade Festus to condemn Paul to death. Why? They had **“zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”**

11. They persisted in rebelling against Rome until Titus breached the walls of the city and destroyed the temple. Why? They had **“zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”**

12. Some Jews in Jerusalem, according to a friend who heard the comments on Israeli radio said that they had rather see sodomites on the streets of Jerusalem than to see Christians there. Why? They had **“zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”**

We might easily make that application to Islam, Hinduism, or New Age religious movements today. The communists sought to destroy us because they believed world wide conversion to the principles of communism were mandated by its founder, but that was a godless, stateless, classless, society. Militant Islam seeks the destruction of Israel and all who support her. Why? They had **“zeal for a false God, but not according to knowledge.”**

Another study that should be of interest to Christians is the number of professing Christians, pastors, of churches who advocate some really bazaar things. Why do they do that? They had **“zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”**

PLEASE CONTINUE THIS STUDY BY GOING TO VOLUME VIII IN THIS SERIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES ([pastorlife.com](http://pastorlife.com)).

