Righteousness, Self-Control, and the Judgment to Come (Acts 24:22-27)

Paul's defense before Felix, Roman governor of Judea (continued)

Tony Garland, SpiritAndTruth.org, 2026-10-29

Context

Acts 24

- Paul accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple in Jerusalem, a riot ensues
- Rescued from a Jewish mob by the authority of Rome
- Jews plot to kill Paul, Roman commander sends Paul under guard to the governor Felix, at Caesarea Maritime on the Mediterranean coast
- Paul’s accusers arrive and Paul gives his defense before Felix

Passage

Acts 24:22-27

22 But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the* Way,
he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down,
I will make a decision on your case." 23 So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul
and to let *him* have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for
or visit him. 24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was
Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25 Now as he
reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was
afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for
you." 26 Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he
might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.
27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the
Jews a favor, left Paul bound. (Acts 24:22-27)

Who's Who?

People of New Testament Times

- 22 . . . Felix . . . having more accurate knowledge of *the* Way . . . (Acts 24:22)
  - Felix's wife was Jewish. She probably would have heard, from her Jewish connections, of Jesus and his followers.
- 24 . . . when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. (Acts 24:24)
  - Background on Antonius Felix
    - "Son of Antonia—mother of Emperor Claudius and daughter of Marc Antony"[3]
    - Appointed Roman governor of Judea by Claudius about 52-53 A.D.
    - Drussila was the first of three wives
  - Background on Drusilla
    - Youngest of three daughters of Herod Agrippa I (the Herod who executed James in Acts 12), sister of Agrippa II and Bernice, before whom Paul would later testify (Acts 25-26)
    - At about age 14, given in marriage to Azizus, king of Emeza, a small kingdom in Syria
    - Left her husband at about age 16, seduced by a friend of Felix

Who's Who?

People of New Testament Times

(139) And when Agrippa had received these countries as the gift of Caesar, he gave his sister Drusilla in marriage to Azizus, king of Emesa . . . (141) But for the marriage of Drusilla with Azizus, it was in no long time afterward dissolved, upon the following occasion:—(142) While Felix was procurator of Judea, he saw this Drusilla, and fell in love with her; for she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty, and he sent to her a person whose name was Simon [not Simon the magician of Acts 8], one of his friends; a Jew he was, and by birth a Cypriot, and one who pretended to be a magician; and endeavored to persuade her to forsake her present husband, and marry him; and promised, that if she would not refuse him, he would make her a happy woman. (143) Accordingly she acted ill, and because she was desirous to avoid her sister Bernice's envy, for she was very ill treated by her on account of her beauty, was prevailed upon to transgress the laws of her forefathers, and to marry Felix -- Josephus, Flavius & Whiston, William[4]

Witnessing before Kings
Predicted by Jesus…

- Jesus had told Paul, through Ananias (not the high priest!) that he would witness before kings
  - 15 But the Lord said to [Ananias], "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." (Acts 9:15)
  - Paul did not have to track down Felix to try and gain an audience—God arranged it through Paul's incarceration.
  - By the sovereign hand of God, Paul is on his "fourth missionary trip."
  - A "warm up" as the stakes get increasingly higher: in the chapter 26 Paul will witness before King Agrippa II (Acts 26:1) before ultimately witnessed before Nero!
  - As believers, we can speak with boldness before people of high-authority because we speak on behalf of the Highest Authority!
  - 46 I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. (Psalm 119:46)

Faith in Christ

Bad news before good news…

- Faith in Christ
  - Heard Paul concerning "the in-Christ faith"
  - Not "generic faith," as in the oft-heard phrase today: "are you a person of faith?" or "we need more people of faith." A "person of faith" can misplace their trust in all sorts of things.
  - The *object* of our faith matters! It must be *in* a specific person: the God-man Jesus Christ
- 25 Now as [Paul] reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid . . . (Acts 24:25a)
  - Paul undoubtedly knew the situation concerning Drusilla, since she was Jewish
    - He goes "straight for the jugular" — Felix and Drusilla's lack of self-control, their unrighteousness
    - As a result, "Felix was afraid"
  - We see an important evangelistic principle here: *bad news* lays the groundwork for the *good news*

Righteousness . . . and the Judgment to Come

Unbelievers don’t (or won’t!) recognize their predicament…

- We must first dislodge the prevalent notion that people are accepted by God based on their "relative goodness" — their moral behavior in comparison with others
  - 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)
  - 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:19-20)
  - 10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." (Galatians 3:10)
  - 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:4)

Today is the Day of Salvation

The gospel divides…

- 25 . . . "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." 26 Meanwhile, he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul . . . 27 . . . after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix . . . left Paul bound. (Acts 24:25-27)
- Every evangelistic encounter forces a response from the listener: ① move *toward* Christ, or ② move *away* from Christ. There is no such thing as a neutral response (even if it looks like it)!
  - Here, Felix moves away—stalls—puts off dealing with the evangelistic challenge
  - Fear was Felix's friend—a potential positive motivation leading toward salvation, but he *squanders the opportunity!*
  - We do not own the results—nobody gets saved apart from a miraculous spiritual work by God. God uses our witness, but we don't do the heavy-lifting, He does.
  - Our job is to be faithful when the opportunity for an evangelistic encounter arises

Today is the Day of Salvation
The gospel divides…

- The division: two spiritual categories
  - Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (Luke 2:34)
  - And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." (John 9:39)
  - 15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? (2Cor. 2:15-16)
- Jesus had previously revealed to Paul that he was to testify in Rome.
  - 11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." (Acts 23:11).
  - But now Paul was stuck for two years in Caesarea going nowhere! How could that possibly have been in the will of God?
  - Yet Paul continued to trust God and walk by Christian principles while his trip remained stalled for an extensive period.

Archaeology

Evidence—when correctly interpreted—supports truth…

- The Bible is not just a book of moral teachings. It contains *real, history* — which can be objectively verified
- Unlike many other religious texts, the Bible is attested to in history by archaeological discoveries and historians
- By comparison, the Q'uran,[5] contains dramatically less historical context
- **Ananias** (son of Nedebaeus, president of the Sanhedrin and high priest under caesars Claudius and Nero *ca.* 47–58 A.D.): attested by early Jewish historian Josephus[6]

  Ananias was assigned the high priestly office by Herod, king of Chalcis (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20 §103). After an outbreak of violence between the Jews and Samaritans, the governor of Syria, Quadratus, sent Ananias and others off in chains to Caesar (Josephus, *The Jewish War 2* §243; *Jewish Antiquities* 20 §131), but they were rescued through the influence of Agrippa II. Ananias may have enjoyed something of a reputation among the people; he certainly used his wealth to bribe individuals and to pay court to the procurator, Albinus, and the high priest who succeeded him. Through the capture of his son and other household members, the Sicarii forced Ananias to convince Albinus to release many of their followers. On the other hand, Ananias' slaves went to the threshing floors and took by force the tithes of the priests. They beat those who refused to yield. As a result, some poor priests died from starvation (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20 §205–13). During the Jewish War, Ananias was seen as a friend of the Romans and his house was burned. Although he managed to flee to the palace of Herod the Great, he and his brother, Ezechias, were later caught and killed by Zealots (Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2 §426, 429, 441–42). -- Freedman, D. N.[7]

Archaeology

Evidence—when correctly interpreted—supports truth…

- **Felix** and **Festus**: attested by coins and Jewish historian Josephus

- The coin profile [from Khirbet el-Maqatir, 9 miles north of Jerusalem] indicates a decrease in population in the early part of Roman rule, 37 B.C. — A.D. 42, with a surge to pre Romans levels in the last 15 years of the town, A.D. 54-69. This, of course, is the period of the New Testament, and many of the rulers named in the New Testament are presented in the Maqatir coins. These include: Herod the Great (37-1 B.C.; Mat. 2; Luke 1:5; 5 coins), Aretas IV (Nabatean king, ca 9 B.C. - A.D. 40; 2Cor. 11:32; 1 coin), Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26 - 36; Mat. 27; Mark 15; Luke 3:1; 13:13,23; John 18; 19; Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28; 1Ti. 6:13; 3 coins), Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 37 - 44; Acts 23:35; 4 coins), Antonius Felix (A.D. 52-60; Acts 23:24,26; 24; 25:14; 3 coins), Porcius Festus (A.D. 60-62; Acts 24:27; 25; 26:24,25,32; 4 coins), Agrippa II (A.D. 53 - ca. 100; Acts 25; 26; 24 coins). -- Bryant G. Wood[8]

- . . . NT figures can also be brought to life through the agency of coins. Thus we feel that people such as Pontius Pilate (Mt 27:2; Lk 3:1; Acts 4:27; 1 Tim 6:13) and Antonius Felix (see Acts 23:23–24:27), although not visible to us in the form of coin portraits, are nonetheless made a bit more real through the bronze coins that bear both their names and their inscriptions and emblems. -- Craig A. Evans, Stanley E. Porter[9]

- (182) Now, when Porcius Festus was sent as successor to Felix by Nero, the principal of the Jewish inhabitants of Cesarea went up to Rome to accuse Felix . . . -- Josephus, Flavius & Whiston, William[10]

Archaeology

Evidence—when correctly interpreted—supports truth…

- **Praetorium** - Herod the Great's Palace at Caesarea: attested by Jewish historian Josephus

The praetorium mentioned in Acts 23:35 was located in the city of Caesarea Maritima. Herod the Great founded the city, and it was known for its lavish building projects, which included temples, a theater, sewer systems, an impressive harbor, and a palace (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.9.6; *Jewish War* 1.21.5, 1.21.8). After taking control of Palestine in ad 6, Rome made Caesarea the region's capital, and Herod's palace served as the official residence for the Roman governor (Murphy O'Connor, *Holy Land*, 240). Excavations in Caesarea have led archaeologists to believe that Herod's palace was located south of the harbor and west of the theater (Netzer, *Architecture*, 106–12). It is this palace that Acts 23:35 suggests as the praetorium where the Roman governor Felix resided and where the apostle Paul stood trial and was incarcerated for two years (Tajra, *Trial*, 117–18). -- John D. Barry, et al[11]

Archaeology

Luke - a first-rate historian…

The accuracy of Luke's use of the various titles of the Roman Empire has been compared to the easy and confident way in which an Oxford man in ordinary conversation will refer to the Heads of Oxford colleges by their proper titles — the *Provost* of Oriel, the *Master* of Balliol, the *Rector* of Exeter the *President* of Magdalen, and so on. A non-Oxonian like the present writer never feels quite at home with the multiplicity of these Oxford titles. But Luke had a further difficulty in that the titles sometimes did not remain the same for any great length of time; a province might pass from senatorial government to administration by a direct representative of the emperor, and would then be governed no longer by a proconsul but by an imperial legate (*legatus pro praetore*). -- F. F. Bruce[12]

[Sir William Ramsay] discovered that [Acts] was true to first-century history. Here are Ramsay's own words chronicling his change in mind: *I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without prejudice in favor of the conclusion which I shall now seek to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavorable to it, for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tübingen theory had at once time quite convinced me. It did not then lie in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely, but more recently I found myself brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth.*" [Josh McDowell, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*] -- 27.2 (2014)[13]

[Acts 14:1-6], for example, was in disrepute historically for many years. The passage implies that Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia but Iconium was not. Later Roman writers (such as Cicero) contradicted the passage, asserting that Iconium was in Lycaonia. For years this was used by the critical school to show the historical unreliability of Acts. In 1910, however, Sir William Ramsay discovered a first-century inscription declaring that the first-century Iconium was under the authority of Phrygia, not Lycaonia. It was only in the second century that territorial boundaries changed and Iconium came under Lycaonian rule. A first-century writer would be aware of this historical detail; a second-century writer could have been ignorant of it. [Josh McDowell, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*] -- 27.2 (2014)[14]

Archaeology
Additional resources…

- *A History of Ancient Israel* by Michael Grisanti and Todd Bolen, 18-30[15]
- *Archaeology and Bible History* by Howard Voss[16]
- *Archaeology and the Old Testament* by Alfred Hoerth[17]
- *Bible & Spade Magazine* by the Associates for Biblical Research[18]
- *The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* by A. Negev[19]
- *The Bible in the British Museum* by T. C. Mitchell[20]
- *The Essential Archaeological Guide to Bible Lands* by Titus Kennedy[21]
- *The Stones Cry Out: What Archaeology Reveals About the Truth of the Bible* by Randall Price[22]

Application
What have we learned?

- **Bad News before Good News** - Apart from notable exceptions where God has already brought people to recognize their need (e.g., the Ethiopian eunuch, the Philippian jailor), most people don't see a need to "be saved." They see no reason for the gospel—often assuming Christianity is just another variation of "being good," as they assume themselves to be. Paul reasoned about "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come," and so should we. By emphazing the bankruptcy of self-righteousness in light of true-righteousness (perfection) we show people—on the basis of their own merit—they are certain to be condemned in the judgment to come. Once they understand the *bad news*, they can appreciated the need to abandon the deception of self-righteousness in exchange for the righteousness of Christ offered on their behalf—the *good news*.

- **Evangelistic Success** - Our "success" at evangelism must not be evaluated based or how many people get saved. Although it is God's and our desire for people to respond positively to the gospel, *by God's design the gospel is divisive*. Therefore, we should not be surprised or interpret it as failure when our testimony is rejected. True success in evangelization is being faithful to present the truth in love when the opportunity arises. God owns the results!

Application
What have we learned?

- **Apprehending God's Sovereignty** - How easy it would have been for Paul to rationalize that God perhaps wanted him to use his financial means in order "facilitate the will of God" and arrange his release by responding to Felix's obvious overtures for a bribe. Yet Paul correctly chose *principle* over *pragmatism*. We should do likewise! This requires us to understand and *apprehend* (grab hold of, like a pit bull grabs a stick) God's sovereignty. It must go beyond mere head knowledge to a place of total commitment. This is what true faith (trust) looks like!

- **Christianity is Evidence-Based** - Christians should confidently embrace evidential science, from A-to-Z (astronomy, archaeology, . . . zoology). God's Word is anchored in reality, both past and present.

Endnotes

Resources for further study…

1. https://spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/82_Acts_24_22-27/index.htm
2. Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
3. Ref-0682, 3:420
4. Ref-0411, xx., 7, 2
5. Ref-0136
6. Flavius Josephus lived in the first century A.D. He was born around A.D. 37-38 and died sometime after A.D. 100.
7. Ref-0379, Robert F. O'Toole, "Ananias (Person)", 255
8. Ref-0066, Bryant G. Wood, *Of Joshua and Jesus: Remarkable New Discoveries at Ai*, Vol. 27 No. 4 (Fall 2014), 95-98, p. 97
9. Ref-1174, Larry J. Kreitzer, "Coiniage: Greco-Roman", 221
10. Ref-0411, xx,8,9
11. Ref-1489, Matthew D. Aernie, "Praetorium"
12. Ref-0239, 82-83
13. Ref-0066, 27.2 (2014), 46-49, pp. 46-47
14. Ref-0066, 27.2 (2014), 46-49, p. 47
15. Ref-1668
16. Ref-1394
17. Ref-1322
18. Ref-0066
19. Ref-0480
20. Ref-0843
21. Ref-1590
22. Ref-0023

References

Resources for further study …

Ref-0023 Arthur W. Kac, *The Messiahship of Jesus: Are Jews Changing Their Attitude Toward Jesus?* (MI: Baker Book House, 1980).

Ref-0066 *Bible and Spade* (Associates for Biblical Research). https://biblearchaeology.org.

Ref-0136 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning Of The Holy Qur'an* (MD: Amana Publications, 2001).

Ref-0239 F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981, c1943).

Ref-0379 Freedman, D. N., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992).

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Ref-0843 T. C. Mitchell *The Bible in the British Museum* (London, England: British Museum Press, 1988, 1998). ISBN:978-0714111551.[d]

Ref-1174 Craig A. Evans, Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). ISBN:0-8308-1780-8.[e] ID=2009072001.

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Ref-1394 Joseph P. Free, Howard F. Voss, *Archaeology and Bible History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). ISBN:0-310-47461-4.[g]

Ref-1489 John D. Barry, et al *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Ref-1590 Titus Kennedy, *The Essential Archaeological Guide to Bible Lands* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2023). ISBN:978-0-7369-8470-6.[h] ID=2024021001.

Ref-1668 Michael Grisanti, Todd Bolen, *A History of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2026). ISBN:978-0-310-25907-7.[i] ID=20261027084528.

Links

Resources for further study …

a - See https://spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm.
b - See https://spiritandtruth.org.
c - See mailto:contact@spiritandtruth.org.
d - See https://spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0714111551.
e - See https://spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-8308-1780-8.
f - See https://spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-8010-1129-0.
g - See https://spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-310-47461-4.
h - See https://spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-7369-8470-6.
i - See https://spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-310-25907-7.