

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## ACTS 24:1-25:12

Here in Atlanta we're used to Law firms that advertise. Drive around Interstate 285 and you'll see a whole smorgasbord of billboards prompting legal services.

["One call that's all"](#) - Ted Nugent

["Helping Georgia Families"](#) - Montlick And Associates

["For The People"](#) - Morgan And Morgan

But there are other lawyers who advertise, and some of them do it in a quite humorous or revealing way...

Here's a billboard, ["MyBaldLawyer.com. Injured? Don't pull your hair out."](#) That's clever ad... As is this one, ["Ever Argue With A Woman?"](#) Hey, Attorney Stephanie May **may** just have a point. I'm calling her...

Or what about Larry Archie's ad, ["Just Because You Did It Doesn't Mean You're Guilty."](#) Wow, that kind of logic might come in handy for some people...

And here's another billboard based on fuzzy logic, ["We have a billboard. We're kind of a big deal."](#) Why would having a billboard mean you're a good lawyer?

Here's another, ["Trust me, I'm a Lawyer. My Dogs Do."](#) *Oh, if a dog trusts you, you must be an honest...*

And speaking of honesty, Attorney Ruth Warner boasts, she's ["An Honest Attorney \(But not honest enough to hurt your case.\)"](#) *She's just being honest!*

*But here's the point behind a lawyer advertising his or her services.. If you're facing a trial, often the merits of your case*

(your true guilt or innocence), may not be enough to determine the outcome. It's not if you're guilty or not, it's whether you have a skilled attorney.

I've heard it said, "The American judicial system doesn't determine innocence and guilt, but who has the best lawyer." And that is not just true in modern-day America, it was also the case in first century Israel.

This is why when the Jewish hierarchy came to Caesarea to prosecute their charges against Paul, they brought with them a high-priced attorney. His name was "*Tertullus*." He was *the Perry Mason, the Ben Matlock, the Jack McCoy* of first century Jerusalem.

Tertullus had billboards all over Jerusalem that read, "Don't Let Them Rule Us, Hire Tertullus." Probably not, I just made that up - but it sounds about right.

And this is where we pick it up, Acts 24:1, "Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders..." Notice, even though Caesarea was north of Jerusalem, we're told the High Priest's entourage "*came down*." Jerusalem is in the mountains, thus to go anywhere from Jerusalem is always a descent.

And at the time, the High Priest, the Czar of Judaism, was a man, 80 years old, named Ananias.

That an octogenarian willingly made a 65 mile trip over rugged terrain is proof of just how much he and all of the Jews hated Christianity's spokesman, Paul.

*And coming with Ananias was his hired gun, his legal eagle, "a certain orator named Tertullus."* Tertullus was a professional orator - similar to a modern trial lawyer.

Once the Stanford Research Institute tested how various professions effected a person's perspective.

The first interviewee was an **engineer**. He was asked, "What does two plus two make?" Being trained in the exactness of mathematics the engineer responded, "Well, in absolute terms, four."

The second interviewee was an **architect**. He was asked, "what does two plus two make?" Due to the creativeness of an architect's craft his reply was more elaborate. "Well, there're several possibilities:  $2 + 2$  makes 4, but so does 3 and 1, even  $2\frac{1}{2} + 1\frac{1}{2}$ ..."

The final interviewee was a **lawyer**. The researcher asked him, "what does  $2 + 2$  make?" The attorney gets up, walks over, shuts the door, pulls the blinds closed; then leans into the researchers, and whispers, "Well, you tell me, what would you like for it to make?" Sad to say, lawyers have the reputation for bending the truth.

And such was the case with this lawyer, Tertullus.

Tertullus was skilled in rhetoric. He was a master of verbal deception. He could flatter a judge, obscure the facts, dress up a lie. He was slick and shrewd. He was a definite truth bender. And he'd been hired by the Jews to present their case against the Apostle Paul.

**"These gave evidence to the governor against Paul."**

And let me just say, I know I'm being a little hard on lawyers. I need to be careful here. As many of you know my daughter-in-law, *who I love dearly*, is a lawyer. I have good friends who are lawyers. There are kind, and honest, and moral lawyers.

We all need to remember, “Lawyers have feelings too. (Allegedly)”

Verse 2, “And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: “Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.”

And here is where we need pockets on back of the seat in front of you, so you can pull out the air-sickness bag. **This is nauseous!** Makes you want to puke. Tertullus claims Governor Felix had brought peace and prosperity to Judea. To the contrary, this Roman Governor was corrupt, and brutal toward the Jews.

Marcus Antonius Felix was the only Roman procurator ever to rise to his position from the ranks of slavery. But though Felix climbed in *status*, he stayed the same in *stature*. He was a brutish, uncouth person.

Tacitus, the famous Roman historian says of Felix, “he had the *power of a king and the mind of a slave.*” Felix was anything but what Tertullus calls him, “*noble.*”

But Tertullus continues, “Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us.” *Hear the schmooze!*

“For we have found this man a plague (literally a pest), a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” He paints Paul as a gang leader. *As if there’s the Bloods and the Crips and the “Nazarenes.”*

Here's another first century name given to the followers of Jesus, **"Nazarenes."** Named after Jesus' hometown... But this was also a derogatory term. Since Nazareth was a hick town, a backwoods, off-the-beaten-path kind of place, this was like calling the Christian community **"rednecks"** or **"swamp people."**

Tertullus actually begins laying out the charges against Paul in verse 6, **"He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law."** Tertullus' first words to Felix are an outrageous lie. Rather than defile Temple protocol, Paul had wanted to placate the Jews by observing their Law, and participating in a Temple-approved ritual.

**"But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands..."** Talk about a rewrite of history - the Roman Commander stepped in only when the situation turned violent. He rescued Paul from a Jewish mob. Instead Tertullus paints the Jews as peaceful and law-abiding, and Lysias as an agitator.

He goes on to blame Lysias for forcing everyone to make this cumbersome trip to Caesarea. The Jewish leaders would've handled *the Paul situation* their own way, and spared everyone this trial if Lysias had just left them alone. By stepping into the fray, Lysias ended up **"commanding his accusers to come to you."**

He goes on in verse 8, **"By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him."** And the Jews also assented maintaining that these things were so." After his opening remarks, Tertullus probably called witnesses

to the stand, who perjured themselves. Tertullus was a slime ball lawyer. He rests his case thinking Paul's goose is cooked.

Verse 10, "Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself..." Paul knew Felix had been around the block a time or two with these Jews. He wasn't naive to their ways. He'd been governor over Palestine for seven years - 52-59 AD.

And Paul is thankful for his longevity, "because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me." Tertullus had been *long on style*, but *short on substance*. The Jews had accusations, but no real evidence to back it up. It was all false testimony.

**Now Paul, the Defense, is going to present his case.** He begins, "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers..." Notice, the Jews at the time considered Christianity "*a sect*" or "*branch of Judaism.*" Most Jews would've considered it a heretical branch of Judaism, but a Jewish sect nonetheless.

Paul on the other hand referred to Christianity as "*the Way.*" Jesus wasn't a sect or one of many sections, a small slice of something bigger. Jesus is "*the Way*" - **the only Way** for all men to relate to God.



Paul goes on to explain his faith, “believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” Paul would not have labeled himself “a former Jew,” but “a fulfilled Jew.” Nothing he believed contradicted the OT, or his Hebrew heritage. *“He believe all things written in the Law and Prophets.”*

Paul’s faith in Jesus was a fulfillment of Judaism.

Jesus had said as much in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” Never did Jesus nullify or contradict Judaism, He simply took it a step further. The work of Jesus **completed** the OT imagery.

*Jesus is the new Temple, the perpetual priesthood, the ultimate sacrifice, the author of a better covenant. He’s the fulfillment of all the prophet’s predictions.*

Verse 16, “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” And this was also how Paul opened his defense before the Sanhedrin back in Acts 23:1 - *before the High Priest had him illegally punched in the mouth.* Paul had always sought to keep a clean conscience.

And here, he gives **his version** of the Temple riot... “Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me.”

Paul wasn't the instigator who stirred up the mob. He'd come into the Temple reverently - to participate in a rite of purification. What created the mob were the false accusations of the Jews. They claimed Paul had brought a Gentile into the Temple, *but with absolutely no evidence of such...* No one even tries to testify to it, lest they be humiliated in the cross-examination.

Paul goes on calling out Tertullus' lack of witnesses, "Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council (Paul baits anyone to step up with a grievance), unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.'"

Here Tertullus must've realized he'd met his match. Paul too was a shrewd debater. A good number of the Jews accusing Paul were Pharisees, who believed in a future physical resurrection of the body. Now Paul insists he's being condemned for the same belief! How can the Pharisees denounce Paul for holding a belief to which they themselves ascribe. It was hypocrisy!

Of course, the original charge against Paul wasn't his belief in *the resurrection of all*, just *the resurrection of One*, Jesus of Nazareth. Yet Paul shrewdly frames his case so it becomes impossible for the Pharisees to condemn him without also condemning themselves.

This is how Paul got off the hook in Chapter 23 in Jerusalem, so he goes to the well one more time. He's gaining experience at getting out of tight squeezes!



Verse 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.””

It’s interesting that Felix had some prior knowledge of Christianity. We’re told later his wife was Jewish. His info may’ve come from her... Felix wants to hear from the commander who initially dealt with the disturbance.

Sadly, there’s no record Lysias ever made it to court.

“So (Felix) 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.”

Paul was placed under house arrest in Caesarea where he’ll live for the next two years. *He can entertain friends. Speak to small groups. Disciple believers. His fellow Christians can visit and bring food and supplies.*

Rather than a cold, dank prison - *God gives Paul a two year all expense paid stay in the beautiful coastal town of Caesarea.* After three long, rigorous missionary journeys, God is supplying Paul a little rest and relaxation. This was Paul’s siesta before his final lap.

And these two years in Caesarea provided Paul’s travel companion, Luke, the opportunity to do the research and verification that went into His writings.

Remember, Luke was an educated man. He was a doctor and a historian. Based in Caesarea with Paul, over the next two years he’ll be able to visit Nazareth, Galilee, Jerusalem,

and Bethlehem. Like a good news reporter Luke will be able to run down the stories.

All over the countryside Luke will conduct interviews with people, who 25 years earlier, were there, firsthand to see the life, and miracles, and teachings of Jesus.

Many of these eyewitnesses were still alive. While based in Caesarea he no doubt spoke to Mary, the shepherds, Jesus' brothers, Peter, John, Nicodemus, the lame man who was healed, even officials in Pilate's court. Imagine, Dr. Luke's interview with Lazarus!

And of course, Luke will compile all his research into two volumes - *the Gospel of Luke* and *the book of Acts*.

Remember both books were dedicated to a rich sponsor named "*Theophilus*." In the opening of Luke's Gospel he refers to "*Theophilus*" by the title, "*most excellent*." This was a common label given to Roman governmental officials... It's possible that Luke's Gospel, and its sequel, Acts, were actually written as part of Paul's legal defense. They were briefs intended to be presented before the Caesar in Rome. The NT's two *longest books* were actually *legal briefs*.

And to me this is all an amazing example of God's undeniable faithfulness. At first Paul's trip to Jerusalem seemed like a disaster, yet God used it give Paul some needed rest and refreshment - **and** to provide the Church two of its greatest treasures: Luke and Acts.

It's proof of the truth Paul wrote to the Romans in 8:28, "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*." Here's a provocative thought... *If Paul hadn't*

*been detained for two years in Caesarea would we even be reading Acts today?.. And could it be that your current troubles or inconveniences are being used by God to do a good thing in your life?*

Verse 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.**”

Felix’s wife was a Jewish princess named *Drusilla*, who came from a famous family. Her predecessors all played important roles in the New Testament narrative.

Drusilla was the great-granddaughter of Herod the Great, the king who slaughtered all the male babies in Bethlehem while trying to kill Jesus... Her great-uncle, Herod Antipas, was the king who beheaded John the Baptist and stood trial over Jesus in Jerusalem... In Acts 12, her father, Herod Agrippa I had the Apostle James beheaded. Agrippa I was the fellow who let the crowd praise him as God, and was judged for his arrogance when worms ate out his intestines...

This Drusilla was the Kate Middleton or Princess Catherine of her day. She was a star in the royal family. She was a Herodian, born into the ruling class.

And over the years she had heard, seen, and read a lot about Jesus. Now to have Paul, Christianity’s leader in her palace, *what an opportunity!* She wanted to interview him. She probably had a notebook full of questions to ask him. *Felix and Drusilla were seekers.*

It would've been interesting to hear what Paul would've said to Drusilla if it had just been her in the room. She was a Jew with a religious background.

But instead when he talks this day, Paul is also speaking to Felix a Roman, and probably a roomful of pagan officials. Verse 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.”**”

Notice the content of Paul's message to Felix. This is important, for here is how Paul spoke to pagans - folks with no religious background. The kind of people we're inclined to meet in our everyday lives. Paul discussed three topics: ***“righteousness, self-control, and the judgement to come.”*** And here's what people in society today need to grasp, even before the Gospel can make sense to them. This is almost a pre-Gospel Gospel.

It reminds me of the Christian who witnessed to folks in the bagel shop. One day he struck up a conversation with a non-Christian couple. He asked the woman, **“What would you like for me to pray for you about?”**

The woman was taken back. She wasn't use to people asking to pray for her. After thinking for a few seconds she said, ***“Health I guess. Pray for my health.”***

The fellow said, **“Health? Why would you have me pray for that. Sooner or later your health is going to go, no matter who prays for you. There must be something more important than that.”** The lady was shocked. She thought, ***“What's more important than my health?”***

The Christian said, “What about your relationship with God?” She replied, “*I never thought about that.*” That’s when her husband jumped in and said, “*You mean God is going to haul us into court or something.*”

And if this couple had heard Paul’s sermon to Felix it would’ve addressed their ignorance... They lacked the knowledge most people today lack: of **“righteousness self-control, and the judgment to come”** - that yes, God *is* going to haul us all into court one day!

Paul spoke of **“righteousness”** - there is a right and a wrong. There is such a thing as absolute truth and final authority. When it comes to right and wrong, we don’t decide for ourselves. There’s a God above us, who is wiser than we are, who alone sets the standard.

And **“self-control”** - that we are responsible for our thoughts and actions. We can’t just live by impulse and do whatever feels good. God requires us to conform our behavior to His standards and exercise self-control.

And finally, **“the judgment to come”** - that one day you and I will stand before the God who decides right and wrong - how we lived, our self-control, will be evaluated - and we’ll be judged accordingly. We’ll give an account of the lives we lived and how we treated people. And we’ll be either rewarded or punished.

It’s only after you understand these three pre-Gospel truths - ***that there is a right and wrong, that I need to conform to God’s standard, and that I’ll be held accountable for doing so*** - that the Gospel becomes appealing... For you quickly realize that you’ve fallen short of God’s standard, and

deserve God's judgment. That's when the news Jesus lived a sinless life, and died in our place, and suffered judgment for us; becomes music to our ears and comfort to our soul.

Paul's sermon on *"righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come"* should've stirred up Felix' heart and caused him to want to hear more, instead he becomes afraid. He's convicted of his sin and plight.

And he orders Paul, *"Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."* Felix delays a decision to a more convenient time... *Listen, it is never more convenient to come to Jesus than right now!*

Statistics show that 82% of all Christians come to Jesus before the age of 19. And here's why... the more times you say "no" the harder it is to say "yes." Resist the Holy Spirit's call and it causes a hardening of the spiritual arteries. And often the effects are irreversible.

In a sense, *commitment is never convenient*, but it's imperative. Verse 25 tells us Felix was *"afraid."* Like a lot of people, he was afraid to relinquish control, and surrender his life to the will of another. This is why salvation takes faith. *Will you trust God with your life?*

But Felix had an additional motive for delaying his dealings with Paul. Verse 26, *"Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him."* Felix delayed closing Paul's case because he hoped for a bribe. He probably saw that Paul had friends on the outside - wealthy friends. And he expected Paul to attempt to buy his own freedom.



“Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.” Evidently, Paul the evangelist and Governor Felix had numerous conversations. *You wonder how many, and when, and what did they talk about?*

Yet apparently a more convenient time for Felix to get right with God never came up! That’s why the most convenient time to come to Jesus is always right now!

Chapter 24 ends, “But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.” The preference of the Jews was for Paul to be put to death, but if they couldn’t have their first choice they would just as soon watch him rot in prison, and Governor Felix was happy to comply. Paul remained under house rest for two whole years...

Have you ever heard the expression “a political football?” It refers to “A political issue that’s continually debated, but never resolved.” It’s an unpopular topic on which neither side of the debate wants to take action.

The decision ends up getting punted back and forth. No one is willing to take the ball and run with it...

When the Roman Governor Festus took over for his predecessor, Felix, the Apostle Paul had become a political football in the Roman court of Caesarea.

Paul was a prisoner, who had become a problem.

After two years of investigation and conversation Felix knew Paul was innocent of any crimes against Rome, but politically speaking what was he to do?

If he released Paul, he would upset the Jews who Felix wanted to placate. If he condemned Paul, Felix could get into trouble with his superiors in Rome. Paul was a Roman citizen which meant he had legal rights.

So like any good politician, what did Governor Felix do? *He punted!* He kept Paul under house arrest; and left his fate to be decided by his successor - Festus.

Acts 25 begins, “Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.” Porcius Festus was the eleventh Roman procurator or governor of Judea. He ruled the region from 59-62 AD. It’s interesting, Governor Festus took over the post at age 70. He ultimately died in office.

Of course, earlier in life, Festus co-starred in a hit television series called “Gunsmoke...” And since most of you are not old enough to have watched “Gunsmoke” I just told a funny that only a few of you could laugh at - a frequent occurrence here at CCSM.

As we mentioned, Felix, had been corrupt and heavy-handed. He’d been a savage of a man. Which meant the Jews had grown to resent his administration.

This is why Festus made it his initial priority to repair the fractured relationship between Rome and the Jews in Jerusalem. Just three days after the new governor’s arrival in Caesarea he goes up to the holy city...

“Then the high priest—and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem -

while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.” Remember in Acts 23, forty men had taken a vow not to eat until they’d murdered Paul. *Now two years later these guys are really getting hungry!* And once again they concoct an assassination plot.

It’s amazing, by now two High Priests had come and gone since Paul’s arrest. The old man, Ananias, is dead. His successor, Jonathan, was murdered by Felix. A third priest, *Ishmael*, is now in power. But it doesn’t matter who the priest is, the Jewish priority is the same. Their opposition of Christianity’s spokesman, Paul, is still alive. Hate has an incredibly long shelf-life.

Verse 4 tells us, “*But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly.*” The new governor smelled a rat.

“*Therefore,*” he said, “*let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him.*” Festus insists on a trial.

He’d been briefed on the charges against Paul, but this was a vital matter he needed to hear for himself.

“*And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.*” American justice has rules forbidding double jeopardy, but not ancient Rome. Paul is now back in court defending himself against the same charges.

Verse 7, “*When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious*

complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, while he answered for himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.” All the Jews could do was throw up lies and false accusations. The same flimsy case Tertullus presented. They had no hard evidence. Paul was innocent of any wrongdoing.

“But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?” Paul was politically astute. He knew what was really happening here. After seven years of Felix’s ruthlessness, the new governor needed to do whatever was necessary to win back Jewish favor.

Governor Festus was new to the province. He might’ve sincerely thought Paul could get a fair trial in Jerusalem, **but Paul knew better.** A trial in Jerusalem would be a death sentence for Paul. The priests would do all they could to kill him. Thus, Paul throws down the trump card he’s had in his hand, but has yet to use.

Remember, Paul was a Roman citizen, and it was every citizen’s right to appeal his case to the Caesar.

Verse 10, “So Paul said, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged.

To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.” Then Festus, when

he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

### **And the new governor seals Paul's appeal!**

But ultimately this was God's decision. Apparently, God got tired of watching His servant Paul get kicked back and forth like a political football. And here God concludes "enough is enough." He forces the hand of the new governor, Festus, to send Paul to Rome.

Remember, when Paul was first arrested in the Temple we're told in Acts 23:11, "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.'" Jesus had promised Paul his ministry wouldn't end in Jerusalem. He'll eventually take the Gospel to the capitol of the empire, Rome.

As far back as Acts 19 Paul purposed in the Spirit that he "must also see Rome." He knew God's itinerary for Him included Rome, *but never in his wildest dreams did he think he would make the trip in this manner...*

By appealing to Caesar, Paul will get the opportunity to preach the Gospel to the Emperor! In addition, the whole trip - *food, travel, taxes, duties, tips* - will be paid for by the Roman government. Here's proof that the old saying is true, "God often works in mysterious ways."

***Indeed He does!***