

Acts 24

Justice vs. Injustice

? What is your favorite courtroom drama – whether it’s a play, TV show, video game, or book? Why does it resonate with you?

Acts 24:1-9 (NIV)

¹Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. ²When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. ³Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. ⁴But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

⁵“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect ⁶and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. ⁸By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.” ⁹The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

Previously in Acts

The book of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit – working through early Christians – helped spread the Gospel and build the global church. In the last couple chapters we’ve seen how Paul was arrested in Jerusalem for speaking the truth about Jesus. He said to the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, “I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead,” referring to Jesus coming back to life. The leaders were furious because he caused a division among their own people. They tried to kill him, plotting against him in several ways. Lysias was the commander who was told about the plot to murder Paul, and presented Paul safely to a Roman governor named Felix.

? Today’s passage plays out like a courtroom drama! Who are the key players in this passage?

The Defendant: _____
The Prosecutors: _____
The Ruling Authority: _____

? Flashback to last study: What did Paul say in the last chapter that made the Jewish leaders so furious with him (Acts 23:6-10)? What action did the Jewish leaders take in retaliation (Acts 23:12-35)?

Note the presence of the rabble-rousing crowd. They’re not meant to present clear testimony or evidence, but to go “Yeah, yeah!” whenever the accusations were made. They added volume and put pressure on Felix as a group, without being legitimate contributors to the trial.

? What accusations about Paul did Tertullus bring to Felix?

Acts 24:10-23 (NIV)

¹⁰When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. ¹¹You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹²My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. ¹³And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, ¹⁵and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

¹⁷“After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. ¹⁸I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. ¹⁹But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. ²⁰Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin— ²¹unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

²²Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” ²³He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

? What four main points does Paul make regarding his innocence?

Point 1 (verse 11): _____

Point 2 (verses 12-13): _____

Point 3 (verse 16): _____

Point 4 (verse 18): _____

? The Jews presented an emotionally-charged accusation, but Paul responds matter-of-factly. What is your typical response when falsely accused?

? What can we learn from Paul’s calmness in the face of false accusations?

? Paul finds common ground with the men who are accusing him. How might finding common ground with people who treat you badly help you resolve conflicts?

? What does Paul say is the true reason for the accusations and danger he's been put in?

? Why were the Jews so threatened by Paul preaching about Jesus?

Acts 24:24-27 (NIV)

²⁴ Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." ²⁶ At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

²⁷ When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

? What actually happened to Paul in the end?

? How do you feel about this result? How does this go against our American/Western "good guy wins" narrative?

Injustice Is Blind
Judicial corruption is a problem that many believers have to navigate in their personal and professional lives on a daily basis. In many countries, corruption is a way of life, an ever-present, insidious problem, and even doing everything "right" doesn't mean you'll be treated fairly. God doesn't promise us an easy life, but He does promise us ultimate freedom in heaven.

? How do you think Paul felt? How would you feel in his place?

? What did Paul do with his time while he was imprisoned by Felix? What can we learn from that?

? What happens to Paul seems unjust, so why do you think God would allow these events to play out the way they did?

For Discussion and Accountability

? What drama are you currently facing in your life that feels unjust or too hard for you? How might God be trying to speak into your life using these events? How can we better trust God in the midst of the injustice in your own life?