**The Jews Get A Lawyer**

(Acts 24:1-16)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A man sat down next to a woman on an airplane one day, and asked him what he did for a living. When he said he was a lawyer, she said, “Honest?” He replied, “No, the regular kind.”

Next, I have a question for you. How does a lawyer sleep? The answer is: first he *lies* on one side, and then he *lies* on the other.

Finally, how can you *tell* when a lawyer is lying? The answer is: his lips are moving!

Well, as I’m sure I don’t have to tell you, very few lawyers are dishonest liars. But here in Acts 24, the unsaved leaders of the nation Israel have hired a dishonest lying lawyer to testify against the Apostle Paul in a Roman court of law. And he’s about to uncork a *boatload* of lies! The story begins in Acts 24:1, where we read,

**“And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.”**

Now to begin with, when we think of an “orator,” we don’t think of a lawyer. We think of someone who is a polished public speaker. And that *is* the first definition of the word in the dictionary. But believe it or not, the seconddefinition is: the man who brings the charges against the defendant in a court of law. Who knew? I didn’t, until I looked it up. And that’s what Tertullus is doing here for those unsaved leaders of the Jewish nation.

But there’s a reason it says that Ananias and the rest of the elders “descended” to the governor’s courtroom in Caesarea. The word *descended* means to go *down,* of course. And Luke is using the word here because the high priest and the elders lived *in Jerusalem,* and Jerusalem was the “city on a hill” the Lord talked about. Jerusalem has an elevation of 2500 feet, or about half the height of the mile-high city of Denver. So the Bible always talks about going *up to* Jerusalem, and *down from* Jerusalem, no matter where you were in relation to north and south.

But symbolically, we’re seeing more evidence here of the *decline* of the nation Israel in the Book of Acts. Ever since the Jews crucified their Christ, and stoned His prophet Stephen, the nation had been going downhill *spiritually.* And we’re seeing that symbolized here in our text when Israel’s leaders *descended* to go testify against Paul.

Now if you think that’s a stretch, if you think I’m reading too much into that word “descended,” consider what happened to Jonah in Jonah 1:1-5, where

**“...the word of the LORD came unto Jonah...saying, *Arise,* go to Nineveh...and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me. But Jonah...went *down* to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish...and went *down* into it...*from the presence of the LORD...*Jonah was gone *down* into the sides of the ship...” (Jonah 1:1-5).**

God told Jonah to “arise,” or *get up,* and go to Nineveh, and when you don’t do what God tells you to do, you’re going spiritually *downward,* and we see that symbolized in those three “down”s there. Jonah should have punted on 3rd down, because 4th down found him *down* inside a whale! And here in our text, the descent of Israel’s leaders from Jerusalem to go testify against Paul is symbolic of how the nation Israel was continuing to go downhill spiritually in the Book of Acts, as we’ve been seeing.

You can even see that symbolized in this lawyer’s name. The name “Tertullus” means *triple-hardened.* The Jews hardened their hearts when they crucified the Lord, and again when they stoned Stephen, and now they were hardening their hearts *again* as they tried to get *Paul* executed by hiring a guy named Triple-hardened to testify against him.

Language experts say that Tertullus was a *Roman* name. In a minute, we’re going to see proof that he was a Jew. But the Jewish leaders chose a lawyer with a Roman name because they were going into a Romancourtroom. If you’re going into a *Polish* courtroom, you pick a lawyer named Ostrowski, right? But picking an attorney with a *Roman* name shows that these Jews thought of everything when it came to going after Paul, because the judge was much more likely to favor them than if their lawyer had a *Jewish* name.

As we read on, we see that the first thing Tertullus did was *butter up the judge,* by saying what he said in verses 2,3, where we read:

**“And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,**

**“We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness” (Acts 24:2,3).**

Now if you want to talk about a *lying lawyer!* Tertullus is blowing so much smoke here, it’s a wonder no one called the fire department. Sccording to secular history, Felix hadn’t provided the nation Israel with *any* worthy deeds, and that’s what that word “providence” there means, the act of *providing* something. According to history, Felix was a bad man, and an even *worse* governor, who hadn’t provided any worthy deeds to *any* nation under his jurisdiction. But Tertullus is making him sound like a *saint.*

And that’s why those unsaved Jews engaged his services in the first place. They *despised* Felix, and they needed someone to make it sound like they *didn’t* despise him. The only “quietness” they “enjoyed” under Felix was the *enforced* kind, the kind that France “enjoyed” under Germany after the Nazis *conquered* them, because Rome had conquered Israel. And the Jews weren’t *the least bit* thankful for it, in Jerusalem, or in any other places where they lived. So those leaders knew that if they represented *themselves* in Paul’s trial, their hatredof Felix would show in their faces, and slip out in their words. So they hired Tertullus to make their case.

And now that he’s buttered the governor up, he begins his address to him in verse 4, where he says,

**“Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words” (Acts 24:4).**

Now “clemency” is fancy lawyer talk for *mercy.* Tertullus was asking Felix to be merciful *with his time—*and if he would, he promised not to be “tedious” or *tiresome* to him by taking *too much* of his time. And now it was time for this slick lawyer’s opening argument against Paul in verse 5, where he said of Paul,

**“For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5).**

Now “pestilent” is the verb form of the noun *pestilence,* which means a *disease,* or a *plague,* as we see when I Kings 8:37 says,

**"If there be...*pestilence*...whatsoever *plague*, whatsoever *sickness* there be...”**

So Tertullus is calling Paul a morally diseased man who had caused more damage in Israel *than a plague.* After hearing that, you feel like facetiously saying, “Don’t sugercoat it like that, Tertullus, tell us what you *really* think!”

But the charge that would have *really* gotten the attention of the governor is when Tertullus called Paul “a mover of *sedition.”* Because the word sedition means to get people all stirred up *against the government,* as we see when Ezra 4:15,19 says,

**“...this city is a *rebellious* city, and *hurtful unto kings*...and... *have moved sedition*...and...made *insurrection* against kings, and...*sedition.”***

But calling *Paul* seditious was a boldfaced lie, because the Apostle Paul never said *one word* against the government, and he never moved anyone *else* to be seditious either. But sedition is the only thing Tertullus could charge Paul with that could get the governor to condemn Paul to death—like the guy in Luke 23:18,19, where

**“...they cried...Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas: (Who for *a certain sedition* made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)”**

Barabbas was condemned to death for sedition, and the Jews wanted Pilate to release him and condemn *the Lord* for sedition, as it says in Luke 23:1,2, where

**“the...multitude...led Him unto Pilate. And they began to ac-cuse Him, saying, We found this fellow *perverting the nation,* and *forbidding to give tribute to Caesar...”***

Now you know that *that* was a lie, because the Lord was famous for saying that we should “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s.” But they had to charge Him with that to get Pilate to condemn Him to death. And Tertullus charged *Paul* with sedition to get *him* condemned to death. And as you can see in verse 5, he charged him with moving sedition *“throughout the world.”*

And the reason he called Paul “a ringleader of the sect of the *Nazarenes”* was due to something we read in John 1:46, where

**“Nathanael said...*Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?”***

Nazareth was the most *despised* city in all Israel, and Tertullus was trying to make Paul look bad by associating him with a group of people who were *called* Nazarenes. This guy’s not missing a trick!

Now it was true, Paul was a *leader* of the Nazarenes, but the word “ringleader” usually refers to a leader of *lawbreakers,* and the followers of Christ were not lawbreakers. So he’s mixing truth with *lies—*and he keeps it up in the next verse of our text, where he says of Paul,

**“Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law” (Acts 24:6).**

Now when he accused Paul of having “gone about” to profane the temple, that’s *different* from charging him with actually *doing* it. *The Jews* had charged Paul with actually doing it in Acts 21:28,29, where they said of him,

**“This is the man, *that...brought Greeks...into the temple,* and *hath* polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)”**

But the phrase “gone about” in the Bible means to *attempt* to do something, as we see in John 7:20, when

**“The people answered and said...who *goeth about* to kill Thee?”**

Our KJV translators translated the Greek word for “gone about” as “assayed” in other places in Scripture, and to *assay* to do something means to *try* to do it, as we see when we read how

**“...they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians *assaying* to do were drowned” (Hebrews 11:29).**

So Tertullus is charging Paul with *attempting* to profane the temple. He’s charging him with *conspiracy* to pollute the temple, not with actually doing it. And that’s because, if you accuse a man of actually doing something wrong *in a court of law,* you have to be able to *prove* he did it. And in the days before forensic evidence like DNA or fingerprinting could prove you did something wrong, that meant they had to produce a *witness* who *saw you* do something wrong. And the Jewish elders didn’t *have* any witnesses who saw Paul profane their temple. All they had were witnesses who could say they saw him *go about* to profane it, because all they had were witnesses who saw him *near* the temple with a Gentile, as we saw a moment ago. So here we see Tertullus was worth every penny they were paying him, because he’s wording his charges *very* carefully here.

And when Tertullus says that they would have judged Paul “according to *our* law,” there’s the proof he was a Jew, for only a Jew would call the law of the Jews, the law of Moses, “our” law.

But claiming that they would have judged Paul according to their law was *another* lie, because we know that

**“...they took Paul...*and as they went about to kill him...*the chief captain...took soldiers...and ran down unto them: and when they saw...the soldiers, *they left beating of Paul”* (Acts 21:31-35).**

They planned to *beat* Paul to death without being judged guilty in a fair Jewish trial, and their law said that a man had to be *stoned* to death *after* he’d been found guilty in a Jewish trial that consisted of 2 or 3 witnesses testifying against him. So Tertullus was lying *again!* And the lies just kept on coming in verse 7, where he said,

**“But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands” (Acts 24:7).**

Now this was actually the *opposite* of what *really* happened. Lysias *rescued* Paul from *their* violence, as we see in Acts 21:31-35, where Luke records how,

***“...as they went about to kill him...*the chief captain...took soldiers...*and...commanded him to be carried into the castle.* And...upon the stairs...he was borne of the soldiers *for the violence* *of the people.”***

It was “the people” *of Israel* who were violent, not Lysias! The only violence the poor chief captain was guilty of was the violent force he needed to use to save Paul’s life from *their* violence!

But after blaming the violence on Lysias, Tertullus tried to pin some more things on him in verse 8, where it says he took Paul out of their hands,

**“Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him” (Acts 24:8).**

If you remember the story, after Lysias rescued Paul from the Jews, he commanded his accusers to travel the 80 miles to Caesarea to accuse him before Felix. In other words, Tertullus was saying, “If that captain hadn’t commanded us to be here, we wouldn’t be here bothering you, Governor Felix! It’s all his fault we’re here being tedious to you!” He’s playing the blame game here, the one that’s been going on ever since God asked Adam if he ate the forbidden fruit, and Adam said,

**“The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, *she* gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:12).**

He was saying, as it were, “It’s the wife’s fault, Lord!”

And if you think about it, he was actually blaming *God.* “It’s the fault of the woman *You* gave me, Lord! If you hadn’t given me that woman, none of this would have happened!” Then, after Adam blamed the woman, *she* blamed the serpent. And the serpent didn’t have a leg to stand on!

Then Tertullus, after shifting the blame to Lysias, closed his accusations by saying that, if Felix didn’t *believe* all the things he was charging Paul with, he could “examine” Paul himself. And *examining* a prisoner in those days meant *beating him.* This guy was actually suggesting that Felix beat Paul until he agreed that the charges were true! That was an awful suggestion, of course, but it brought a round of hearty *amens* from the Jews, as we see in verse 9, where it says,

**“And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so” (Acts 24:9).**

They said, “Yeah! Everything he said is true, and we agree!

But here, I need to point out that Paul hadn’t interrupted Tertullus as he was spewing forth those lies and accusations against him. That’s how you show respect in court!

And now that Tertullus has obviously rested his case, the governor let Paul know that it was his turn to speak in verse 10, where it says:

**“Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself” (Acts 24:10).**

Now as you can see here, Paul begins his answer by being as respectful to Felix as Tertullus was. But he doesn’t stoop to praising a man who didn’t deserve any praise. All he said was, “I’m happy to answer for *myself—*instead of hiring some slick lawyer to answer *for* me—because after so many years of judging the nation Israel, I’m sure you can smell Jewish lawyer smoke a mile away. So all I have to do is tell the truth!”

And I think the reason Paul *mentions* those years was to remind Felix that, in all those years, Paul had never *before* been brought into his courtroom! He’d never been charged with any *prior* offences, which he surely *would* have been if he was the ringleading mover of sedition throughout the world that Tertullus was making him out to be! What a brilliant response!

And in the next verse, Paul says something that just blows their accusations out of the water, when he said,

**“Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship” (Acts 24:11).**

“Because” Felix had been judging the nation of Israel for many years, he would know that the Jewish feast of Pentecost had begun *12 days earlier.* So he’d be inclined to believe Paul when he said he came to Jerusalem to *worship* during the feast, and *not* to cause trouble! *And,* if he’d only been in Jerusalem for 12 days, he couldn’t *possibly* be guilty of all the crimes they accused him of—especially since we saw in verse 1 that for *five* of those 12 days he’d been in Felix’s custody!

You say, “What about the *other* 7 days? What was Paul up to then?” Well, let me read to you what he was *doing* during those 7 days, and you tell me how much trouble he could have gotten into. Luke wrote,

**“...*we...went up to Jerusalem*...Then Paul took the men, *and...purifying himself with them* entered into the temple....*And when the seven days were almost ended,* the Jews...went about to kill him” (Acts 21:15,26,27,31).**

Paul had spent the other 7 days *purifying himself in the temple*—not *profaning* the temple! And he could produce *witnesses* to prove it—like the men who purified themselves *with him* in the temple, *and* the chief priest of the temple, who was there in the courtroom that day accusing him!

Then, as we read on, Paul points out that *Tertullus* hadn’t produced any witnesses to prove *his* case

**“And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city.**

**“Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me” (Acts 24:12,13).**

Paul’s accusers couldn’t produce any witnesses that what they said was true, not like Paul could!

But you might be wondering about the veracity of what Paul said there in verse 12 when he asserted that they hadn’t found him disputing with anyone in the synagogues, because over the years, Paul had done his share of disputing with Jews in the synagogues. Acts 17:16,17 says of Paul that

**“at Athens...*disputed* *he in the synagogue* with the Jews...”**

We see it again a few chapters later, when

**“Paul...came to Ephesus...and he went into the synagogue...*disputing* *and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God”* (Acts 19:1,8).**

But what Paul said in court that day was true. They hadn’t found him *in Jerusalem* disputing in synagogues on his latest trip to the city, because that’s not why he’d *come* to Jerusalem. You see, by this time in Paul’s ministry, the time for disputing was past. He’d already made the case for the gospel among the Jews in every city he’d gone to. He came to the city of *Jerusalem* for a *different* reason. He came to do what he told Titus to do in Titus 2:7,10, where he told the young man to

**“In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works....*adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour* in all things.”**

Once you’ve made the case for the gospel, you have to *adorn* the gospel by doing good works. And that’s what Paul was doing in Jerusalem. He’d come to do the good work of giving the money he collected from the Gentile churches to give to the Jewish kingdom churches in Jerusalem, hoping that would melt the hearts of the *unsaved* Jews in Jerusalem, and get them to open their ears and hearts to the gospel.

I think there’s something we can learn from his example. Lately I’ve been sharing the gospel with a man, and I’m not going to quit, but I know there’ll come a time when he’ll pay as much attention to what I *do* as to what I *say.* So be sure to adorn the gospel *you* share with others with good works as well.

*And,* make sure it’s true of you what Paul says was true of him in verse 13, that no one can provethe things they accuse you of. People are always going to accuse Christians of things. I know I’ve been accused of my share of things over the years, and perhaps you have as well. But you want to live your life in such a way that they can’t *prove* what they charge you with. That way, if you get charged with doing something *that’s against the law,* as Paul was here, all you’ll have to confess to in court is what Paul confessed to in verse 14 of Acts 24, where he said,

**“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14).**

All that Paul had to confess was that he preached things people called heresy. Well, hey, that’s something that’s true of *all* grace believers!

But this is another verse that’s a little puzzling, because Tertullus hadn’t *called* Paul a heretic, and he hadn’t accused him of teaching heresy, and neither had anyone else. But up in verse 5, he called Paul a ringleader of the “sect” of the Nazarenes, and—do you know who *starts* sects? Heretics! The Greek word for “sect” is even the same as the word translated “heresy” here in verse 14.

But as Paul said here in verse 14, he *didn’t* teach heresy. A heresy is a teaching that disagrees with an established religion. But Paul’s new message of grace *didn’t* disagree with the established religion of Judaism. Do you remember what James said after he heard Peter summarize what Paul preached? He said,

**“...to this *agree* the words of the prophets; as it is written...” (Acts 15:15).**

And then he went on to *quote* one of the prophets to *prove* that Paul’s message agreed with Judaism, and was in perfect accord with the law and the prophets.

Think it through: Paul preached grace, right? Do you know what’s going to happen after the dispensation of grace is finished? The prophet Hosea predicted that God will say to Israel,

**“O Israel, *return unto the LORD thy God;* for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. *Take with you words,* and turn to the LORD: *say unto Him,* Take away all iniquity, and receive us *graciously”* (Hosea 14:1,2).**

So when *Paul* preached grace, it wasn’t heresy! He believed everything in the law and the prophets. He just knew that grace is the *answer* to the law—just as prophets like Hosea said it was! All Paul was doing was preaching grace to Jews who wouldn’t *ask* for grace until the kingdom. What’s so heretical about that?

And he also preached something *else* that agreed with what the Jews taught—something he went on to tell us about in verse 15, where he said,

**“And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15).**

Now that word “allow” there has more than one meaning in the Bible, just as it has more than one meaning in the dictionary. It can mean to *permit* someone to do something, and that’s how we usually use it. When I was a teenager, my cousin used to have a sign on her bedroom door that said, “No Bozos allowed!”

But the *first* definition of “allow” in older dictionaries is not to *permit.* It’s to *admit.* Like when a defense attorney says, “I’ll allow that my client had no business being there in the first place.” And that’s how Paul is using the word here. The Jews *admitted* that someday the dead will rise.

Of course, you might be thinking that Paul was wrong in saying that, because not *all* Jews admitted the dead will rise. After all,

**“...the Sadducees say that *there is no* resurrection...nor spirit...” (Acts 23:8).**

The *Sadducees* didn’t admit that there shall be a resurrection of the dead. So it sure looks like Paul misspoke when he said his accusers admit there will be, because most of his accusers were Sadducees, as we learned a few lessons ago.

But do you remember what happened when the Sadducees asked the Lord a question about resurrection? He answered them, saying,

**“...as touching the resurrection...have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*. And when the multitude heard this, they were *astonished* at His doctrine...the Pharisees...heard that *He had put the Sadducees to silence...”* (Matthew 22:31-34).**

Now it’s obvious that people in those days were able to follow the Lord’s argument there. But if you’re not sure *you* follow it, it helps to remember that Sadducees didn’t believe in *spirits* either (Acts 23:8). So they didn’t believe what we believe, that when you die your spirit keeps on living, and waits for your body to rise from the dead to reunite with your spirit. They believed when you’re dead, *you’re dead;* i.e., you cease to exist.

But 200 years after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob died, God told Moses, “I am the *God* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” And if He wasn’t the God of dead people, that meant that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *were still alive,* and waiting for their bodies to rise from the dead.

And the reason people were “astonished” at the Lord’s answer is that the Sadducees had been denying the resurrection ever since they were formed over 200 years earlier, and *nobody* had been able to silence them! Nobody had ever been able to answer the question they had asked the Lord about resurrection, and nobody had ever been able to come up with an argument from the Scriptures *proving* the resurrection. But after the Lord did, they had to admit that there *was* such a thing as resurrection.

Now they didn’t *act* like they admitted it. They just kept on teaching heresy. You say, “That doesn’t make sense! How could they get away with that? How could they get away with teaching something that went against what their own Bible said?” If so, it might interest you to know that *the Mormons* did it *for 40 years!* Their Bible, The Book of Mormon, was written in the year 1830. And The Book of Mormon *forbad* polygamy! So they had to admit that their Bible was against having more than one wife. But they *practiced* polygamy until 1890!

You see, once you throw your phony Bible out, your phony religion doesn’t *have* to make sense! And once the Sadducees threw the *true* Bible out, their religion didn’t have to make sense either!

Of course, if you ignore your Bible, your conscience is going to bother you. But what’s Paul say in the last verse of our text?

**“And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward**

**God, and toward men” (Acts 24:16).**

Paul says that “herein”—*in knowing that the dead will rise,* he hadn’t offended God by teaching things that didn’t agree with the Scriptures, and he hadn’t offended the Jews or any other men either.

And that’s how we should live as well. Don’t be a Sadducee! Don’t go to church on Sunday morning and admit that what the Bible says is true, then go home and disobey it by offending God or men.

If there’s no resurrection from the dead, let’s all eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die, as Paul talked about in I Corinthians 15. But if there *is* a resurrection coming, let’s live for

the Lord who died for us and rose again. Who’s with me?