

ACTS CHAPTER 25

Paul appeals to Caesar to avoid a plot against his life

I APPEAL TO CAESAR

Acts 25:1-12

"Three days after he had entered into his province, Festus went up to Jerusalem. The chief priests and the chief men of the Jews laid information before him against Paul. They urged him, asking a favor against Paul, to send for him to be brought to Jerusalem, for they were hatching a plot to murder him on the way. But Festus replied that Paul was under guard at Caesarea and that he himself would soon be leaving. 'So,' he said, 'let your men of power come down with me, and, if there is anything amiss with the man, let them make their accusations.' After spending no more than eight or ten days amongst them, when he had gone down to Caesarea, he took his place on his judgment seat and ordered Paul to be brought in. When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem surrounded him; they leveled many serious accusations against him which they were unable to prove, while Paul said in his defence, 'I have committed no crime either against the Laws of the Jews, or against the Temple, or against Caesar.' But Festus, with the desire to ingratiate himself with the Jews, replied to Paul, 'Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and in my presence to be tried on these charges?' But Paul said, 'I am standing at Caesar's judgment seat where I ought to be tried. I have committed no crime against the Jews as you very well know; but if I have committed some crime and if I have done something which merits death, I am not trying to beg myself off dying. But if there is nothing in the charges of which they accuse me, no one can hand me over as a favour to them. I appeal to Caesar.' After Festus had conferred with his assessors, he said, 'You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go.'"

Festus was a different type from Felix;

we know very little about him but what we do know proves that he was a just and upright man.

He died after only two years in office but he died with an untainted name.

The Jews desire to re-try the case against Paul when Festus replaces Felix

1) Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, 2) where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. 3) They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way.

The Jews tried to persuade him to send for Paul to come to Jerusalem;

they had formed another plot to assassinate Paul on the way.

The Jews say that they want to examine Paul, but really it is just a ploy to get him back to Jerusalem so they can kill him.

They plan to murder Paul in an ambush along the way.

Festus re-opens the trial in Caesarea

4) Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. 5) Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong."

6) After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. 7) When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him,

bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove.

8) Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

Festus was a Roman, with the Roman instinct

He told the Jewish leaders to come back to Caesarea with him and plead their case there.

From Paul's answer we can deduce the malicious charges which they leveled against him.

They accused him of heresy, of sacrilege and of sedition.

No doubt from their point of view the first charge was true,
but it was irrelevant to Roman law;
the second two were deliberate lies.

The outcome of this trial is the same:

the Jews offer many accusations which they could not prove,
Paul confidently rests on both the evidence of the case and his
apparent integrity.

Paul's appeal to Caesar

9) Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

10) Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. 11) If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

12) After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

Festus had no desire to get up against the Jews in the first days of his governorship and he offered a compromise.

Was Paul, he asked, prepared to go to Jerusalem and stand his trial there while he stood by to see fair play?

Paul knew that for him there could be no such thing as fair play at Jerusalem and he took his great decision.

If a Roman citizen felt he was not getting justice in a provincial court, he could appeal direct to the Emperor.

Only if the man was a murderer, a pirate, or a bandit caught in the act, was the appeal invalid.

In all other cases the local procedure had to be listed and the claimant had to be dispatched to Rome for the personal decision of the Emperor.

Now Festus has a unique problem, he is the new governor and here is a guy whom the Jews hate, who is appealing to Caesar.

So, he should send Paul to Rome, yet on what charges?

When Paul uttered the words, "I appeal to Caesar," Festus had no choice;

Paul was appealing specifically to Caesar Nero - who was later an avowed enemy and persecutor of the Christians.

During the first five years of his reign, when he was under the influence of good men around him, Nero was regarded as a wise and just ruler.

Paul had no reason at this time to believe that Nero would be anti-Christian.

Paul is convinced that the evidence is on his side and because he senses that perhaps his current judge is sympathetic to his accusers.

Paul, in very different circumstances from those of which he had dreamed, had set his foot upon the first step of the road that led to Rome.

Paul's generous "imprisonment" in Caesarea was actually a providential provision of protective custody against the murderous intentions of the Jews, as well as a "forced rest" in light of his unfailing missionary service in years past, and great tasks in the years ahead.

Paul's hearing before King Agrippa

FESTUS AND AGRIPPA

Acts 25:13-21

"When some days had elapsed, Agrippa, the king, and Bernice came to Caesarea to welcome Festus. As they were staying there for some time, Festus referred Paul's case to the king. 'There is a man,' he said, 'who was left behind by Felix, a prisoner. When I was in Jerusalem the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid information before me concerning him and asked for his condemnation. I replied to them that it is not the custom of the Romans to grant any man's life as a favour before the accused meets his accusers face to face and receives an opportunity to make his defence against their charge. So when they came down here I made no delay, but on the next day I took my seat on my judgment seat and ordered the man to be brought in. The accusers rose and brought against him none of the accusations of crime which I was expecting; but they had an argument with him about their own religion and about someone called Jesus who was dead and whom Paul insists to be alive. I did not know what to make of the dispute about these matters so I asked him if he was willing to go to Jerusalem and to be tried there on these charges; but Paul appealed and demanded to be held for His Majesty's investigation and decision; so I ordered him to be held until I should remand him to Caesar.'"

Agrippa was still king of a quite small part of Palestine, which included Galilee and Peraea; to the northeast of Festus' province.

It was his custom to pay a courtesy visit to the new Roman governor when he entered his province.

He knew quite well that he held his limited realm by the whim of the Romans.

They had put him there and they could just as easily remove him.

Bernice was a sister of Drusilla, the wife of Felix, and she was also a sister of Agrippa himself.

Incest on the throne! Agrippa and Bernice, husband and wife, and brother and sister!

Festus explains the case involving Paul to the visiting King Agrippa

13) A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. 14) Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. 15) When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.

16) "I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. 17) When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. 18) When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. 19) Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. 20) I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. 21) When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar."

22) Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself." He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him."

Festus, new to his post and perhaps unfamiliar with Jewish traditions and customs, seems somewhat confused by Paul's case; so even though there was not enough evidence to convict Paul, the investigation continues.

Festus, knowing that Agrippa had the most intimate knowledge of Jewish faith and practice, proposed to discuss Paul's case with him.

He gave Agrippa a characteristically impartial review of the situation as it existed at that moment; and now the stage was set for Paul to plead his case and bear his witness before a king.

Jesus had said, "***You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake***" (Matt.10:18).

The hard prophecy had come true; but the promise of help was also to come abundantly true.

Matthew 10:19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

Agrippa is the last of the Herods.

The dynasty of the Herods were Edomites,
he was Idumean (he came from Edom).

The Edomites came from Esau, the rival brother of Jacob (whom the Jews came from).

The Romans had established the Edomites on the throne, which created a strange situation because, while they were familiar with the customs of the Jews, they were not Jewish.

- Herod the Great attempted to win the favor of the Jews by rebuilding the Temple.

- Herod the Great was the one who killed the babes in Bethlehem.
- Herod Antipas was the one who beheaded John the Baptist when Salome danced for him.
- Herod Agrippa I is the one who put the apostle James to death with a sword.
- Herod Agrippa II is the one seen here.

Herod Agrippa II was reputed to be an expert in Jewish customs and religious matters. The emperor gave him the right to oversee the affairs of the temple in Jerusalem and the appointment of the high priest.

He did not have jurisdiction over Paul in this case, but his hearing of the matter would be helpful for those who did.

FESTUS SEEKS MATERIAL FOR HIS REPORT

Acts 25:22-27

"Agrippa said to Festus, 'I, too, would like to hear the man.'

'Tomorrow,' he said, 'you will hear him.'

So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with much pomp; and when they had come into the audience-chamber with the captains and the leading men of the city Paul was brought in.

So Festus said, 'King Agrippa and all who are here present with us, you see this man, concerning whom the whole community of the Jews kept petitioning me both in Jerusalem and here, crying out that he ought not to be allowed to live any longer. I understood that he had done nothing to merit death. But when this man himself appealed to His Majesty, I gave judgment to send him.'

I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. So I have brought him in before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, when investigation has been made, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to send the charges against him."

Festus had gotten himself into a difficulty.

It was Roman law that if a man appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome there must be sent with him a written account of the case and of the charges against him.

Festus' problem was that, as far as he could see, there was no charge to send.

That is why this meeting had been convened.

It was with pomp that Agrippa and Bernice had come.

They would have on their purple robes of royalty and the gold circlet of the crown on their brows.

Doubtless Festus had donned the scarlet robe which a governor wore on state occasions.

Close at hand there must have stood Agrippa's suite and also in attendance were the most influential figures of the Jews.

Close by Festus there would stand the captains in command of the five cohorts which were stationed at Caesarea; and

in the background there would be a solid phalanx of the tall Roman legionaries on ceremonial guard.

Into such a scene came Paul, the little Jewish tent-maker, with his hands in chains;

From the moment he speaks, it is Paul who holds the stage.

There are some men who have an element of power.

When a man has Christ in his heart and God at his right hand he has the secret of power.

Of whom then shall he be afraid?

Rom 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

Psa 27:1 <A Psalm of David.> The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Festus makes an opening statement at the hearing of Paul before Agrippa

23) The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24) Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25) I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. 26) But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. 27) For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him."

Festus intends to use this trial to prepare an official brief for Paul's upcoming trial before Caesar.

The 'place of hearing' was the amphitheatre on the beach at Caesarea.

It would have been packed out.

People would have been dressed up.

Soldiers would have been standing guard.

Dignitaries would have been escorted in.

It was a real 'happening' whenever there was an official hearing in this beautiful amphitheatre overlooking the Mediterranean.

In II Corinthians 10, Paul described his own appearance as being physically weak.

Historians verify that

he was a short man with bowed legs,

a long hooked nose,

little hair, and

runny eyes

— and yet here this 'little man' commanded the attention of the entire Roman provincial capital of Caesarea.

Where Jesus is, things happen in a big way.

Remember just who is on trial here!

Festus, Agrippa, Bernice and the rest are really all on trial before the God who Paul preaches; he is not on trial before them.