

**ACTS 24-25 PAUL BEFORE FESTUS AND KING AGRIPPA**



In this Bible Study, we transport ourselves to the beautiful Roman capital of Caesarea, built as an artificial harbor by Herod the Great.

Before us, a trial is going on, where Felix, the Roman governor, is presiding. The Jewish leaders, including the priests, had come down from Jerusalem to accuse Paul of heresy, sedition and having introduced a Gentile into the Temple, charges that could mean a death sentence for Paul.

After their Jewish lawyer accused Paul of these things, it was now time for Paul to defend himself. He would do so as a Roman citizen in a Roman court, which gave him many legal rights.

Paul starts, "'Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, 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.

"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, 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. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. 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. Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, 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'" (Acts 24:10-21).

So Paul successfully countered the charges against him since there were no witnesses present of having actually seen him in the Temple with a Gentile or having incited a riot. He also mentioned

he had gone there as a Jew, first, to bring alms, offerings and food to help alleviate the drought suffered in Judea and was also completing a purification vow. He also asserted this whole issue had a doctrinal origin, dealing with the controversy of the resurrection of the dead.

Felix, the governor, was impressed with Paul's defense but did not want to upset the Jewish leaders that he needed for political support, so he adjourned the meeting until Lysias, the Roman commander in Jerusalem, could give his testimony.

Luke says, "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.' 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" (Acts 24:22-23).

Notice Christianity is here called "the Way," for it is truly a way of life. Felix decides Paul should be kept in custody but with certain liberties, allowing his friends to visit him and provide food, supplies, and clothing. This certainly shows the governor did not consider Paul a dangerous criminal.

Luke continues, "And after some days, when Felix came with his Jewish wife, Drusilla, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 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. 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. But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound'" (Acts 24:24-27).

Here we see what worldly injustice can do. Although Felix knew Paul was innocent, he wanted to take advantage of the situation, expecting Paul to pay him a bribe, which Paul refused to do. Felix was also spiritually tone-deaf, for when Paul spoke to him about the essentials of the gospel of the kingdom--righteousness, self-control and the

coming judgment--Felix was frightened, knowing he was guilty of many sins.

For instance, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, Felix's wife, Drusilla, was only sixteen, when Felix used a magician named Atomos to persuade her to leave her husband and marry him, committing adultery, and becoming Felix's third wife. Such were the times. So Paul languished in Roman custody for two years, refusing to pay a bribe, but as a Roman citizen, he could continue pastoring by writing and sending his epistles to the Gentile churches through his chosen envoys.

Felix was then replaced by a new Roman governor of Judea, Porcius Festus. He was appointed by the notorious Emperor Nero in the autumn of A.D. 59. He first arrived at the port of Caesarea, the political center for the Roman province of Syria, of which Judea was a part.

Festus is known in history as a much better and fairer official than Felix, although he only lasted two years. He was appointed by the Emperor Nero in A.D. 59, but suddenly died two years later.

Luke records, "Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. 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. But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly. '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'" (Acts 25:1-5).

The Jewish leaders still wanted Paul dead and thought it would be easier by bringing him to Jerusalem, but Festus first insisted on Paul, as a Roman citizen, to have a fair trial at Caesarea.

Luke continues, "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.

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.' 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?' (Acts 25:6-9).

Festus now put him in a difficult spot. Paul had not forgotten the vow some Jews had made to ambush him when possible. If he was taken to Jerusalem or while there, he would be in constant danger of being assassinated. So he did the most prudent thing available to him--appeal to Caesar--a right he had as a Roman citizen.

Luke mentions, "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!' (Acts 25:10-12).

F. F. Bruce explains, "Festus heard Paul's words with much relief. By appealing to the supreme court, Paul had shown him a way of escape from a difficult and disagreeable duty. He conferred with his council--a body consisting of the higher officials of his administration and younger men who accompanied him in order to gain experience in provincial government--and willingly granted Paul permission to have his case referred to Rome.

"To us who know Nero's record in relation to Roman Christianity, it may seem strange that Paul should have appealed with such confidence to him. But, whatever Nero's personal character might be, the first five years of his reign (A.D. 54-59), when the imperial administration was carried on under the influence of his tutor Seneca, the Stoic philosopher and Afranius Burrus, the honest prefect of the praetorian guard, were looked back upon as a miniature Golden Age. There was little in A.D. 59 that gave warning of the events of A.D. 64 [when Nero martyred many Christians after the great fire in Rome]" (*The Book of Acts*, p. 479).

Next, King Agrippa arrives and Luke says, "And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. When they had been there

many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: 'There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.' Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in" (Acts 25:13-17).

This King Agrippa is known in history as Herod Agrippa II. Barclay relates, "Agrippa was still king of a quite small part of Palestine, which included Galilee and Perea; but he knew quite well that he held even that limited realm by grace of the Romans. They had put him there and they could just as easily remove him. It was therefore his custom to pay a courtesy visit to the Roman governor when he entered his province. Bernice was a sister of Drusilla, the wife of Felix, and she was also a sister of Agrippa himself. 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' (Mat. 10:18). The hard prophecy had come true; but the promise of help (Mat. 10:19) was also to come abundantly true" (notes on Acts 25:13).

Luke continues with Festus' words to King Agrippa about Paul's trial, "When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.' Then Agrippa said to Festus, 'I also would like to hear the man

myself.' 'Tomorrow,' he said, 'you shall hear him.' So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in. And Festus said: 'King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him" (Acts 25:13-27).

Barclay describes the scene quite well, "Festus had got 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. There is no more dramatic scene in all the New Testament. 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; and yet 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?" (notes on Acts 25:13). Next time, Paul speaks to King Agrippa II.