

The Book of Acts

Chapter 25

Acts 25:18-19

18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:

19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

1. Review of chapter 21-24
1. Last week we reviewed Paul's trial before Felix.
2. In context, we remember Paul had been arrested in the temple, pulled out by a mob and beaten, and would likely have been killed if the Roman soldiers hadn't intervened and took him into their custody.
3. They had intended to flog him to get a confession out of him, but Paul first asked to address the crowd.

4. He gave his testimony up to the point where Jesus told him to preach to the Gentiles. Then the crowd took to attacking him again.
5. The Romans then took Paul intending to give him the confession flogging. As they strapped him down for the flogging, Paul stated he was a Roman citizen, so they stopped that plan and scheduled a hearing before the Jewish council the next morning.
6. The next morning, Paul began his defense, and with his first sentence, the high priest had Paul slapped in the mouth.
7. Paul tried another approach. He told the divided council that he was a Pharisee and believed in the resurrection, which set the council in turmoil and Paul was assaulted again.
8. A plot to kill Paul was planned and the Romans learned about it and used 472 soldiers to move Paul to the capital city of Caesarea, 65 miles northwest of Jerusalem,

and called a hearing there before the Roman Governor, Felix.

9. The Jewish lawyer, Tertullus presented the case for the Jewish elders, and then Paul made his own defense.
10. Felix and his wife listened to him separately, asking questions about Jesus.
11. Felix left Paul in jail for 2 years until the end of his term in office expired and next it was time for the new governor, Festus, to move the case along.

II. Paul's Trial Before Festus (Verses 1-12)

A. Timeline of world powers over the land of Israel until Christ

- 586 BC: Jerusalem destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and the Jews had been either in captivity in a foreign land, or under foreign rule.
- 537 BC: Babylon was conquered by the Medo-Persia and their King Cyrus, made a decree allowing Jews to return to

Jerusalem, rebuild their Temple, and reestablish their worship of God.

- 520 BC: Second temple rebuilt.
 - 331 BC: The Greeks under Alexander the Great conquer the land of Israel.
 - 230-146 BC: Rome has conquests against the remnants of the Greek empire.
 - 142-129 BC: Jews have brief time of self-rule in the land of Israel under the Hasmoneans.
 - 63 BC: Rome takes control over the land of Israel.
1. Although the Jews were permitted to return to their former land of Israel and were able to carry on their religious affairs, except for that brief 13-year period of self-rule under the Hasmonians, they had been under the rule of other world powers up to the time of Christ.

2. And as we read throughout the New Testament, Rome was in charge during that period.
 3. And Rome permitted various members of the Herod family to rule varying portions of this land with the title of king or tetrarch.
- B. Roman political divisions over Israel during Apostolic times
1. But during the time of Christ's ministry on earth, and during the apostolic period of the early church, the provinces of Judaea and Samaria where Jesus did most of His ministry, were under the rule of Roman governors while outlining areas like Galilee were under rule by Herod's family.
 2. Caesarea had been established as the residence of the governor and the Roman capital of these provinces, but Jerusalem remained the religious capital of the Jews.

3. Last week we met the Roman Governor, Felix, who listened to Paul's case and put him on hold for two years.
 4. In Acts 24 we learned that Governor Felix was replaced by another Roman, Governor Festus.
 5. Felix had been familiar with the Jewish religion as his wife, Drusilla, was a Jewish princess.
 6. I'll point out that in chapter 25 we will meet two of Drusilla's siblings, King Herod Agrippa II, and Bernice.
- c. The new governor meets Jewish leadership
1. So after Felix came into office, we learn that he very quickly went to Jerusalem to consult with the Jewish temple leadership.
 2. Jerusalem had always been a political hotspot for Rome, so in his week on the job, he headed there:
Acts 25:1 Now when Festus was come into

the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

3. After only three days in office he went to Jerusalem to meet with their leaders, and to learn as much as he could that might help him in his new relationship with them.
4. The Jews had tried to get former Governor Felix to return Paul to Jerusalem, but without success.
5. Now that Festus was governor, they renewed their efforts to have Paul brought out from the safety of the prison in Caesarea.

Acts 25:2-3

2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,

3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

6. You can see that they pretended to desire to try him again in Jerusalem, but this was

only an excuse to get him out in the open so they could assassinate him.

7. Two years, 40 men had bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.
8. They must have been pretty hungry by now(!) as they had never given up their plans to kill him at any cost.
9. Festus rejected their petition, and required them to come to Caesarea to present their charges before the Roman court.

Acts 25:4-6

4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the

judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

- D. Paul's case heard by Festus
 - 1. So a delegation of Jews went to Caesarea to formally present their charges.
 - 2. You will notice that Luke provides only a summary of this hearing, unlike the first hearing before Felix where he provided details of Tertullus' and Paul's remarks.
Acts 25:7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.
 - 3. No doubt they were the same charges as those presented by Tertullus in Paul's trial before Felix (Acts 24:1-9) and they still could not prove them.
 - 4. Paul's response is summarized in verse 8:
Acts 25:8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither

against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

- E. Festus offers a compromise
- 1. Festus did the judicial thing and sought to find a middle ground to settle this case:
Acts 25:9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?
- 2. Paul had the right as a Roman citizen to present his case fairly before his accusers, and the Jewish court was in Jerusalem, so Festus thought this would be a good compromise and middle ground if a Roman official could judge the case in Jerusalem.
- 3. However, Paul knew of the vile tactics of the Jewish leadership better than Festus did.
- 4. He knew he was not guilty and did not wish to bow to the will of the Jewish leaders. But

his remaining legal options were: Jerusalem or Rome? Which will it be?

5. I'm sure Paul remembered what it was like the last time he testified in Jerusalem, where he was nearly pulled apart by the Jewish council.
6. But more than that, I'm sure Paul also had in mind what Jesus said when He appeared to Paul that night:
Acts 23:11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.
7. So Paul decided on Rome for two reasons. First, Jesus had told him he'd be going there two years before this day. And second, as a Roman citizen, he had the option to assert his right to appeal to the supreme court of Caesar in Rome.
8. Let us likewise never forget our dual citizenship. We are citizens of the Kingdom

of God first, and then citizens of USA. Our responsibility is first to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

F. Paul appeals to Caesar

1. So that is what Paul decided

Acts 25:10-11

*10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews **have I done no wrong** [Paul has three times now publicly declared an innocent conscience], as thou very well knowest.*

11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.

2. That likely caused shock and murmuring in the courtroom. What Paul was saying was that he wanted to appeal his case to the

highest court in the Roman Empire, to the Roman Emperor, Nero.

3. Festus responded with contemplation and conversation with his legal council:

Acts 25:12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

4. That was a significant legal shift. From sitting in a jail cell for two years with little activity, now Paul will be on the journey of a lifetime as he heads to Rome.

5. This was Paul's first major journey not as a missionary but as a Roman prisoner, and Festus was no doubt relieved to get this political problem off his hands.

III. Agrippa's State Visit to Festus (Verses 13-27)

A. King Agrippa greets Festus

1. But before Festus can send Paul to Nero, he must come up with a written statement of

charges, and he was not very familiar with the Jewish religion or the violations to their law that Paul was alleged to have committed.

2. So, Festus turned to the long-serving Herod family for advice. They had been permitted to rule in this area on Rome's behalf since before Jesus was born. And it is now around 60 AD.
3. King Herod Agrippa II comes onto the scene in the next verse. King Agrippa rules areas northeast of Samaria, while Judea and Samaria are ruled by Roman Governors **[map-Agrippa II rule]**:
Acts 25:13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.
4. Herod Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I, who had killed James the brother of John and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:1-25).
5. He was a great grandson of Herod the Great.

6. So when Festus became governor, Herod Agrippa II with his sister Bernice came to Caesarea to pay him a courtesy state visit.
7. The timing of this visit was fortuitous for Festus as he hoped Agrippa's political experience and knowledge of Jewish affairs might be helpful in dealing wisely with Paul's case.

B. Festus explains his dilemma

1. So Festus explains his dilemma to King Agrippa:

Acts 25:14-21

14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:

15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.

16 To whom I answered, It is not the

manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.

18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:

19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.

21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I

commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.

2. Paul's case sounded interesting to Agrippa and he expressed a desire to hear him. And Festus was very pleased to arrange such a hearing in the hope that he might yet determine his responsibility in the case of Paul.

Acts 25:22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

- c. King Agrippa's grand entrance
 1. The following day Festus arranged for Agrippa and Bernice to hear Paul speak for himself.
 2. Notice how the king and his sister entered the courtroom:

*Acts 25:23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, **with great pomp**, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and*

principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

3. Great pomp comes from the Greek word, phantasia, meaning fantasy, a vain and splendid show, display.
4. If he had only learned something from his father, Herod Agrippa I, who we learn in chapter 12 had James executed, had imprisoned Peter pending the same fate, and then killed the soldiers on duty after Peter was set free by an angel.
5. And this is how his father's fatal fantasia was described in Acts 12:

Acts 12:21-23

21 And upon a set day Herod [Agrippa I], arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

22 And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the

glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

6. Herod Agrippa II did not die at this time, however. God wanted him to hear the gospel message first.

D. Paul introduced to the court

1. Back to Acts 25. See who else arrived in the courtroom:

*Acts 25:23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the **chief captains**, and **principal men of the city**, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.*

2. The chief captains and principal men of the city likely made up the council of Festus' court.

3. So with Paul standing before them, Festus introduced Paul to this audience:

Acts 25:24-27

24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all

men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

4. Festus was determined to send him to Caesar, but he was in the embarrassing position of having no charge to make against him.

5. Paul was a prisoner whom he could not release, and was committed to send to the emperor, and now hoped that Agrippa, who was familiar with the Jews' religion, might help him to determine some crime with which to charge him.