

The Acts of the Apostles

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

God Continues in Plan A Paul’s Trial Before Festus

Chapter Twenty-five

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Acts 25:1 “Festus therefore, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.

Acts 25:2 And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul; and they were urging him,

Acts 25:3 requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way).

Acts 25:4 Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly.

Acts 25:5 "Therefore," he said, "let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him."”

After two years, the group is still after Paul! I do think that the oath-takers have not been true to their oath! Festus showed that he was a talented official in that he quickly went to Jerusalem to meet with the Jewish leaders and to determine if he needed to do anything to keep peace in the area. He indeed did quickly find out that there was a serious group of people with charges against a prisoner in Caesarea who had been there over two years. The group still had their assassination plan ready for Paul if they could just get Festus to have Paul brought to Jerusalem. However since the plans of Festus involved going back to Caesarea soon he told them to come there with him and they can make their charges there. Undoubtedly Festus had read the material of Lysias and Felix concerning Paul but he wanted to see the interactions for himself.

Acts 25:6 “And after he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea; and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.

Acts 25:7 And after he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove;

He did not immediately go back to Caesarea as he implied but he did only stay a few days. He was then quick in setting up the trial. The presentation of the Jews was probably similar to what had been done in front of Felix but Luke does not give the details. Luke did report that the charges of the Jews could not be proven any more than the previous charges could be proven.

Acts 25:8 while Paul said in his own defense, "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

Luke also only gives us the brief facts stated by Paul in that he had committed no offenses against the Law of the Jews, against the temple, or against Caesar. He may have even stated his defense so succinctly since the Jews were unable to prove any crimes against Paul.

Acts 25:9 But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?"

Acts 25:10 But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.

The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the land over which Festus came to rule and it indeed behooved him to try to work closely with them and to at least appear to be their friend. Paul was a Roman citizen so Festus had to make sure that Roman justice was followed in this case as well as trying to keep peace with the Sanhedrin. It actually probably seemed like his request to Paul was reasonable especially since the most major charge was the temple violation that occurred in Jerusalem. However Paul knew that the same attack against his life was probably still in force so he did not want to go on such a dangerous journey.

Acts 25:11 "If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar."

Paul made it clear to Festus that he was not trying to escape justice for if indeed he had committed a capital offence then he was willing to pay the supreme penalty. But he also realized that the only way he was going to get out of the Jewish trap was to appeal to Caesar. This right of appeal was open to any Roman citizen but it was usually exercised after a local verdict had been made. Paul knew that Felix had found him innocent of any charges and was ready to release him after a period of procrastination during which time he probably thought the Jews would forget about Paul. But Felix did nothing and left the situation to the new ruler and the Jews did indeed have a long memory. Since Paul had no direct information about the legal procedure in Rome he probably assumed that he would be treated fairly there. He also had wanted to go to Rome to preach the gospel message. His appeal to Caesar then stopped the current process.

The current Roman ruler was Nero and in our present place in history we may think it odd that Paul would appeal to Nero! But the first five years (54-59) of Nero's rule were somewhat of a golden era in his history. There was nothing in his actions to indicate that the awful events of 64 and 65 A.D. would follow these early years.

Acts 25:12 Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.""

We are sure that Festus was much relieved to hear Paul's appeal to Caesar for this let him out of a conflict for which he did not see any solution. His conference with his council was perfunctorily done for once Paul made his appeal the matter was closed.

Acts 25:13 "Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, and paid their respects to Festus.

Acts 25:14 And while they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix;

Acts 25:15 and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation upon him.

Acts 25:16 "And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges.

Acts 25:17 "And so after they had assembled here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought.

Acts 25:18 "And when the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting;

Acts 25:19 but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive."

Festus now had only one required project and that was to prepare a report to Caesar on the matter with Paul. No doubt he had all of the paper work of Felix and others in the case but he still was not certain how to prepare his report. Agrippa was king of a neighboring region who had come to pay his respects to Festus in his new position and Agrippa was reportedly very knowledgeable in the Jewish religion so Festus hoped that Agrippa could help him understand the charges against Paul. Festus seemed to have understood the matter better than he thought for indeed the basic issue is the resurrection of Jesus. However Festus did not really understand the importance of the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul certainly understood!

1Cor 15:16 "For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;

1Cor 15:17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

1Cor 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1Cor 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."

Acts 25:20 "And being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters.

Acts 25:21 "But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar."

Acts 25:22 And Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

Agrippa probably understood enough about the Christian movement to have his curiosity raised at the prospect of talking with one of the leaders of the religion. Festus then agreed to let Agrippa talk with Paul.

Acts 25:23 “And so, on the next day when Agrippa had come together with Bernice, amid great pomp, and had entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.

Acts 25:24 And Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer.

Acts 25:25 "But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.

Acts 25:26 "Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write.

Acts 25:27 "For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."”

What a magnificent event! It was in no sense a trial for Paul had already appealed to Caesar and would be taken to Rome as soon as possible. The occasion was purely unofficial in an effort for Festus to gather enough information to write his report to accompany Paul to Rome.

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