

PAUL BEFORE FESTUS

TEXT: ACTS 25:1-27

INTRODUCTION:

1. In Acts chapter 24, Paul stood before Felix, and now in chapter 25 he stands before Festus (24:27; 25:6).
2. Both Felix and Festus were crafty politicians (24:27; cf. 25:9).
3. Meanwhile, the Jews were up to their same tricks, attempting to lure Paul into an ambush (25:2, 3; cf. 23:12-16).
4. But Paul was safe because the Lord had already assured him that he would go to Rome (Acts 23:11).
5. Unlike Claudius Lysias, the chief captain, who was notified by Paul's nephew, Festus knew nothing of the murderous plot against Paul. Truly it was God who kept him from granting the desire of the Jews (25:3, 4).

I. PAUL BEFORE FESTUS (25:1-8).

1. The "province" (25:1) refers to the province of Judea. At that time Judea was a Roman province. After three days Festus "ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem" (25:1).
2. In Scripture, people are always said to ascend to Jerusalem, and descend from Jerusalem.
3. When Festus arrived in Jerusalem, the high priest and the chief men of the Jews "informed him against Paul" (25:1, 2). The Jews had been very busy "informing" the Roman authorities against Paul (cf. 21:21, 24; 24:1; 25:15; etc.).
4. Unfortunately, most of their "information" was false (25:7; cf. 24:13). The Jewish leaders endeavoured to prejudice the mind of Festus against Paul.
5. Albert Barnes said, "They thus showed their unrelenting disposition. It might have been supposed that after two years this unjust prosecution would be abandoned and forgotten. But malice does not thus forget its object; and the spirit of persecution is not thus satisfied."
6. The Jews asked Festus to have Paul brought to Jerusalem for trial, though they failed to mention their real intention was to kill him on the way (25:2, 3).
7. Luke does not say but it could have been the same band of men who formerly conspired to kill Paul. If it was the same group, they must

- have been very hungry (cf. 23:12, 20, 21) for two years had already passed (24:27)!
8. Throughout the last few chapters we have noticed how the Lord used Roman officials to providentially protect Paul. For example, the chief captain came to his rescue on several occasions.
 9. Now we see the governor Porcius Festus protecting Paul by refusing to transfer him back to Jerusalem (25:4).
 10. Barnes said, "It is altogether probable that if this request had been granted, Paul would have been killed. But God had promised him that he should bear witness to the truth at Rome, (23:11), and his providence was remarkable in thus influencing the mind of the Roman governor, and defeating the plans of the Jewish council."
 11. Festus did allow the Jews an opportunity to go to Caesarea to try and settle the case. "You (that) are able" (25:5) refers to men that were "mighty in wealth and influence."
 12. The Jews agreed to this and they accused Paul once again (25:5-7). They "laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove" (25:7; cf. 24:13, 19).
 13. Once again, Paul persisted in defending himself against their baseless charges. He was not guilty of breaking the Jewish laws; he was not guilty of polluting the temple; and he was not guilty of treason against Caesar (25:8).

II. PAUL APPEALED UNTO CAESAR (25:9-12).

1. Verse 9 says Festus was willing to do the Jews a pleasure and said to Paul, "Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?"
2. This is similar to Acts 24:27, where it says that Festus' predecessor Felix was "willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, (and) left Paul bound."
3. At this point Paul stated that he stood at Caesar's judgment seat (in Caesarea), which was the appropriate place for him to be judged.
4. Furthermore, he repeated that he had done nothing wrong, as Festus very well knew (25:10).
5. In verse 11, Paul stated that if he had committed any thing worthy of death, he refused not to die. Paul believed in the death penalty and he was ready to submit to it, if he was proven guilty.
6. This Scripture affirms capital punishment. God instituted capital punishment when he ordained human government.
7. Genesis 9:6 says, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

8. When God gave the law to Moses at Mt. Sinai, He said, "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death" (Exodus 21:12).
9. The death penalty is supported by many Old Testament scriptures (Exodus 21:12, 14, 15, 17; Leviticus 24:17; Numbers 35:16-18; Deuteronomy 24:7; etc.).
10. God ordered Joshua and Israel to execute the death penalty upon Achan (Joshua 7:15, 25).
11. Furthermore, God has never repealed the death penalty (cf. Romans 13:1-7).
12. After repeating his innocence, and declaring his willingness to submit to the death penalty if he was guilty, Paul added, "but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar" (25:11b).
13. Nero was Caesar (the emperor) at this time. After Julius Caesar, all of the Roman emperors were called Caesar.
14. Another term used for the emperor was "Augustus" (25:21, 25; 27:1). It literally means "venerable" and the title was first given to Octavius, Julius Caesar's adopted son and successor.
15. Octavius was the emperor who sent out a decree that all the world should be taxed (Luke 2:1).
16. Octavius was referred to as Caesar Augustus, and the title continued to be used for all his successors in office, "as denoting the veneration or reverence which was due to the rank of emperor" (Barnes).
17. Festus also refers to the emperor as his "lord" in Acts 25:26. Neither Augustus nor Tiberius would let allow that title, but Nero liked it.
18. Nero was one of the most cruel and wicked men that ever sat on a throne. It was under him that Paul was afterwards beheaded. It is interesting that Paul preferred facing Nero than returning to Jerusalem and having to deal with the treacherous and murderous Jews.
19. Plus, Paul sought an opportunity to preach the Gospel in Rome.
20. Acts 19:21 says, "After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome."
21. Then later on, the Lord told Paul, "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11).
22. Paul wrote in Romans 1:15, "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."

23. Paul wrote in Romans 15:23 about "having a great desire these many years to come unto you."
24. This is the first time Paul appealed to Caesar. Paul was a Roman citizen, and appealing to Caesar was a legal privilege that was available for Roman citizens.
25. Charles Ryrie wrote, "When Paul saw that Festus was anxious to make concessions to the Jews he feared that his trial would no longer be conducted impartially; therefore he appealed to Caesar...Paul may have used this right of appeal to Caesar in order to settle once and for all the question of whether or not Christianity was a legitimate religion independent of Judaism" (*The Acts of the Apostles*).
26. After conferring with his council, Festus agreed to Paul's appeal (25:12).
27. Festus was a typical crafty politician. He did not want to deliver Paul to the Jews because that would be in violation of Roman law; and he was not willing to free Paul, because that would make him unpopular with the Jews (cf. 25:9).

III. KING AGRIPPA AND BERNICE ARRIVE AT CAESAREA

1. The purpose of their visit was to "salute (greet him and show him respect as the governor of Judea) Festus" (25:13). Apparently this was a routine visit and while they were in town, Festus discussed Paul's case with them (25:14-21).
2. John Phillips calls this King Agrippa "the last of the serpent brood of the Herods" (*Exploring Acts*).
3. This King Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa I, the king that God killed in Acts 12 (12:1-3, 21-25). He killed James, and then was himself eaten of worms.
4. He was also the brother of Drusilla, the wife of Felix (Acts 24:24).
5. He was also the great grandson of Herod the Great, who attempted to kill the baby Jesus.
6. Herod Antipas, who had John the Baptist beheaded, was his uncle.
7. Bernice was Agrippa's sister (25:13). According to both Jewish and Roman historians, their relationship was incestuous. Before living with Agrippa she was married to her uncle.
8. *Barnes' Notes* said she "lived in a manner such as to excite scandal. Josephus directly charges her with incest with her brother Agrippa."
9. These were the type of immoral people in positions of authority, and Paul had to stand before them as their prisoner.

10. Matthew Henry said, "Such lewd people were the great people generally in those times! Say not that the former days were better."
11. Festus explained to Agrippa all that had transpired, and he reaffirmed his belief in Paul's innocence (25:18-21).
12. Regarding verse 16, Barnes said, "It was for this that the equity of the Roman jurisprudence was celebrated throughout the world. We may remark, that it is a subject of sincere gratitude to the God of our nation, that this privilege is enjoyed in the highest perfection in this land. It is the privilege of every man here to be heard; to know the charges against him; to be confronted with the witnesses; to make his defence; and to be tried by the *laws*, and not by the passions and caprices of men. In this respect our jurisprudence surpasses all that Rome ever enjoyed."
13. The story of Paul's arrest interested Agrippa, and he said to Festus, "I would also hear the man myself." Festus answered him, "Tomorrow, thou shalt hear him" (25:22).
14. The next day, Agrippa and Bernice came into the judgment hall "with great pomp" (25:23). Accompanying them were "the chief captains, and principal men of the city" (men of reputation and influence), and at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth (25:23b).
15. Festus had not been able to discover any evidence of any offense on the part of Paul. Furthermore, his ignorance of Jewish law made it difficult for him to write a report (25:24-27).

CONCLUSION:

1. Paul before Festus and King Agrippa is one of the most interesting stories in the Bible.
2. Amidst all of the glitter and glamour and worldly pomp (25:23), stood the greatest preacher of all time, after the Lord Himself.
3. Paul stood as a prisoner of Rome because he preached about "one Jesus" (25:19).
4. To Festus, Jesus was just a Jew "which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (25:19).
5. Festus had no interest in finding out more about Jesus -- His life, His death, His burial, His resurrection, His miracles, His teachings, and so on. None of this interested him.
6. This was Festus' opportunity to become a Christian, but sadly, he let it pass by.