

Acts 25

Acts 24:24-25 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. **25** And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

What caused Felix to tremble ? The verse tells us, Paul's teaching on "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come ... it is certain that Felix was devoid of "righteousness"& "temperance" ... leaving a person nothing to look forward to but the judgement in which Paul had only recently taught in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 1:18-2:11 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed [it] unto them.

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified [him] not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

31 Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Romans 2:1-11 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.

3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;

6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds:

7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:

8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,

9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;1

10 But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:2

11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

Now back to Felix.

Acts 24:26-27 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. **27** But after two years Porcius Festus (POR-cee-uhs FES-tuhs) came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

Acts 25:1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

PORCIUS FESTUS TAKES OVER:

Boles said, that "Festus was a better man than Felix, there being a strong contrast here between the honesty and straightforwardness of Festus and the wickedness of Felix," it is true, nevertheless, that Festus was a worse governor, affording a startling proof that a strong evil ruler is sometimes better than a good weak one.

The incompetence of Festus must have been the laughingstock of the whole temple crowd in Jerusalem. He was naive, totally ignorant of the devices of the people he had come to rule, agreeable, gullible, and obsessed with such a desire for popularity that he would gladly have sacrificed an innocent man to enhance his standing with the Jews and the Sanhedrin Court.

Now another governor of Judaea kept an innocent man in prison that he might make himself popular. Felix and Festus both from the same motive riveted the chains of an innocent man. Thus the same enmity of the world against the gospel which set Barabbas free and killed Jesus ... left Paul bound.

"ascended from Caesarea ..." Luke is always perfect, Jerusalem is up-hill ... Although Caesarea was his capital, Festus quite properly understood that Jerusalem, as the largest city of his province and the center of the religious hierarchy of Israel, which was of major concern to him; hence the trip so soon after entering into his new dominion.

Acts 25:2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,

The pressure of this request from the leading Jews was implicit in the fact that they were powerful enough to have "brought about the removal of Festus' predecessor Felix" and they doubtless thought they could take advantage of Festus' newness in office and his natural desire to please such an important group of his subjects.

Acts 25:3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

"laying wait in the way to kill him ..." Festus, of course, had no idea whatever of the murderous plot and cunning deceit of the religious apparatus of the Jews. He should have known that the "favor" they had asked of him was based upon some damnable scheme of their own; but Festus seems to have accepted their request as honorable. It was his jealousy for the power of his own office as Procurator which led him to deny their request, as in the next verse.

Acts 25:4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly [thither].

This was a mortal danger to Paul. For if Festus had honored the request of the high priest and his group to bring Paul to Jerusalem, the apostle would almost certainly have been killed. Festus would not have sent such a large escort as Lysias had sent, for he was ignorant of any danger. God, however, protected Paul, using the new governor's vanity as the motivation of his denial of the "favor" they coveted. Thus, as Wesley said: "By what invisible springs does God govern the world! Festus' care to preserve the imperial privileges was the means of preserving Paul's life.

Acts 25:5 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.

Acts 25:6 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.

PAUL'S FOURTH DEFENSE: THE SPEECH BEFORE GOVERNOR FESTUS

Commentators have lavished praise on Festus for this prompt hearing; but there is no indication that his promptness was due to anything other than the insistence of the high priestly conclave on action as soon as possible. What is in evidence here is not a new governor's anxious desire to further justice, but a servile willingness to appease Paul's bitter enemies the powerful Jewish Sanhedrin.

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.

the Jews which came down... These had evidently traveled with Festus (Acts 25:5), bending the ear of the governor during the journey whom they hoped to manipulate. This group was headed by the high priest, an imposing figure indeed; and many a procurator could tell of the power of such a man.

“... grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove ...” no doubt the charges were the same as those reviewed in the last chapter, with whatever variations the priests might have used in an effort to dress up their worthless case against Paul. They were as ineffective before Festus as they had been before Felix. Luke did not bother to record them in detail; and Paul's defense is summarized in the next verse, it is evident that his reply was the same as before.

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 anything at all.

For all their cunning, the priests overreached themselves by alleging Paul's sinning against Caesar; for Festus could not have let a charge against Roman Law be tried by them. That it was not true is evident in Festus' apparent willingness to declare Paul innocent of the charges against Caesar, if Paul would consent to be tried by the Jews on the other allegations (Acts 25:9). The Caesar mentioned here was Nero, the time being about 59 AD

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?

Paul very well knew that the incompetent Festus was no match for the temple Jews who had no intention whatsoever of trying Paul ... all they wanted was to expose him so their assassins could kill him. After all, it must be supposed that after two years those forty conspirators were getting pretty hungry.

One may feel nothing except contempt for a governor like Festus. Felix would have had far too much sense to suppose that such a proposal could end in anything except death for Paul, had it been accepted. Paul's only hope of saving his life lay in exactly what he did, appealing to Caesar.

Acts 25:10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.

This was absolutely the only avenue left open to Paul. The namby-pamby Festus knew he was innocent, but insisted on taking him to Jerusalem, where Paul would certainly have been murdered.

Ecclesiastes 10:16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king [is] a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!

Festus was a "child" in understanding.

"...I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest." Paul's rebuke of this childish governor, in such an appeal, was fully deserved; but his abrupt appeal to Caesar must have come as a shocking surprise to Festus. Having his very first case appealed to Caesar was not exactly the way he had hoped to begin his term as governor. Still, it did get him "off the hook" with regard to the Jews from Jerusalem whom he sought to please.

I stand at Caesar's judgment seat ... has the meaning of "I have been standing a long time" at Caesar's judgment-seat, Festus' tribunal and "I ought to be judged" here, rather than before some court in Jerusalem.

Acts 25:11 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.

I refuse not to die ... Paul meant by this that he was not appealing for the sake of avoiding punishment for a crime, but in order to prevent his being murdered.

Every Roman citizen had a right of appeal from lower tribunals in the empire to the final court of the emperor in Rome; and once an appeal was registered, it had the effect of stopping all further litigation and transferring the case to Rome. Thus, it was his Roman citizenship which saved Paul's life here.

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

Conferred with the council ... This was not the group of Jewish priests, but his own legal advisers. Festus' legal staff at once assured him that Paul's appeal would have to be honored.

Unto Caesar shalt thou go ... Some have read a sinister note into this remark, as if Festus already knew what a beast Nero was, and that the remark here was uttered with that in mind. However, as Nero, the Caesar mentioned here, had not yet developed the character by which he is notoriously remembered in history ... "There was little in A.D. 59 that gave warning of events in AD 64.

Acts 25:13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.

“Agrippa the king ... In this ruler, the last of the Herodian dynasty appeared; and with his death in 100 AD, the sordid record of the whole infamous family ended. He and his sister Bernice had another sister Drusilla (see under Acts 24:24), all of them being great-grandchildren of Herod the Great who had sought to murder the Christ in his infant cradle.

AGRIPPA AND BERNICE

Agrippa II was the son of Agrippa I. In the great war (66 to 70 AD), he sided with the Romans; and after the war was confirmed in his kingdom, living until AD 100.

When Bernice, his sister was only sixteen, and already twice married, in A.D. 48, she moved in with her brother Agrippa I. Juvenal, the Roman satirist, called her "Agrippa's incestuous sister" . She was later the mistress of both Vespasian and his son Titus who would

have married her except for popular outrage of the people. She and her brother were the "royalty" who heard Paul on this occasion.

Thus, in these two chapters, three of the great-grandchildren of Herod the Great "adorn" the pages of the New Testament!

To salute Festus ... Some have supposed that as "a king" Agrippa outranked Festus, but this is not the case. The visit here was a compliment paid by the sub-servant king to the representative of Rome.

Acts 25:14 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:

It was only natural for Festus to discuss such a prisoner as Paul with his guests and his reason for this will come in the next verse.

Acts 25:15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed [me], desiring [to have] judgment against him.

desiring [to have] judgment against him ... This is important as showing that the Jerusalem leaders had demanded a guilty verdict of Festus. They desired from the judge partiality, not justice and they probably offered him money.

Acts 25:16 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 license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

From this it is crystal clear that the high priests had requested a guilty verdict against Paul without the formality of any kind of trial.

Acts 25:17 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.

Festus hid his purpose in all that promptness, of pleasing Paul's accusers.

Acts 25:18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:

Here in the mouth of Felix is the verdict of innocence which he did not have the moral fiber to announce.

Acts 25:19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

Pagan that he was, Festus spoke sneeringly here of a dead Jesus, Paul said was alive, affirming by such language his skepticism and lack of concern.

Acts 25:20 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.

This was a misrepresentation. There was no need to inquire any further of charges that had not been proved, were in fact incapable of proof and Festus' proposal was made solely out of a desire to please his subjects in Jerusalem. His allegation of a different motive when thus discussing the matter with his guests shows that secretly he was ashamed of what he had done.

Acts 25:21 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.

Augustus ... Caesar ... Two titles given here to Nero should be noted. The first of these is actually "Augustus" which was the title given by the Roman Senate on January 17, 27 BC to Gaius Caesar Octavianus (63 BC to AD 14). "Augustus" also translates "Sebastos," and sometimes emperor, as in this verse. It was later applied as a title to any head of the Roman state. The same is true of "Caesar." Still a third title of Roman emperors, "Lord," is used a little later in this chapter (Acts 25:26). This title of "Lord" or "Dominus" carried a divine connotation and was first used by Caligula (AD 12-41). Augustus and Tiberius rejected such a title and would not allow it to be applied to them. However, we may suppose that Nero would have received it gladly.

The names of these ancient Roman rulers are still continued today in the names of the months of July and August, the cities of Augusta, Augsburg, Sebastopol, etc., all being derived from them

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

I would also hear the man myself ..." Agrippa and his sister must have heard many things about Jesus Christ and the faith regarding him, because it was their great-grandfather who had slaughtered the innocent children of Judaea in a vain attempt to murder the Lord in infancy; it was their father who restored the dominion of Herod the Great, seized and executed James the apostle with the sword, and imprisoned Peter who was delivered by an angel. He was the same Herod, whom the Lord slew at Caesarea in 44 A.D. It was also an uncle of theirs who had murdered John the Baptist and mocked the Lord during his Passion.

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Isaiah 62: 2 And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name.

The setting of this scene was Caesarea, where some thirteen years earlier Herod Agrippa I, the father of this King Agrippa, Bernice and Drusilla, suffered a divine judgment in a sudden and horrible death

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.

Great pomp ... Here is the only appearance in the New Testament of this word "pomp." The touch of the eyewitness narrator is evident and one may imagine the ostentatious display of royal apparel, military uniforms, soldiers at attention, the decorations and flags that adorned the hall of meeting, and, over all, the proud demeanor of the Roman deputy Festus, who would hardly have allowed himself to be surpassed in splendor by his royal guests.

What a shame that all that external beauty was lavished upon a weakling like Festus and his royal guests. Little could any of them have realized that their place in history would depend almost altogether upon the important little man whom the soldiers brought chained before them. They did not know this, but Paul knew it:

I Corinthians 1:25-29 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, [are called]: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God

hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, [yea], and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

with the chief captains, and principal men of the city ... These were the chiliarchs of the Roman garrison commanded by the governor, each of whom led a tenth of a legion or a thousand men. The plural here suggests that the military arm was a strong one. The principal men of Caesarea would have been its business and leaders.

Acts 25:24 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.

both at Jerusalem, and [also] here... the Jews of Caesarea had also taken part in the proceedings.

crying that he ought not to live any longer ... that they too had been clamoring for a capital sentence.

Acts 25:5 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.

Nothing worthy of death ... How quickly this public announcement would have spread through the city, and how happy Philip and all of the Christians there must have been upon hearing of the governor's verdict. What a shame that the governor had withheld it until Paul, out of concern for his life, had been forced to appeal to Caesar.

Acts 25:26 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.

No certain thing to write ... This was what was bugging the procurator. Why not write the facts, namely, (1) that having found Paul innocent, he did not have the moral guts to release him, and (2) that not having the courage to tell the Jews, he had tried to persuade Paul to go up to Jerusalem and be tried by the Sanhedrin, Festus of course looking on. One has to admit that such a truthful report would probably have provoked his immediate recall. Yes, he was in a predicament.

"... my Lord" as a title of Caesar,

Acts 25:27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes [laid] against him.

Unreasonable ... What was truly unreasonable was Festus' own unconscionable delay in announcing the verdict of innocence; and it was not less unreasonable that he proposed sending Paul back to the people who were so determined to kill him. It was that latter thing, really, that forced Paul's hand and led to the appeal. This concluded the opening remarks of the governor; but instead of introducing Paul, he yielded the honor to his guest. The next chapter gives Paul's speech.

Sources: KJV Bible, theWord.com, Burton Coffman, BW Johnson, Adam Clark, FF Bruce, McKnight and JW McGarvey, George Faull Commentaries, Wikipedia, and World Conquest.