

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

January 31, 2024

Series - The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

Paul's Appearance Before Festus

Text – Acts 23:33 – 35; Acts 24

Introduction



Review

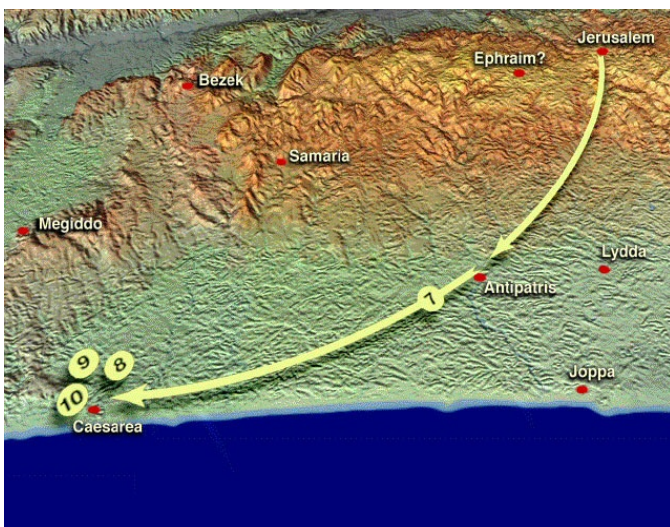
In Acts 21 the Apostle Paul concludes his third missionary journey, and travels back to Jerusalem so that he could participate in the Feast of Pentecost, and so he could deliver an offering that he had collected from the people in Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia Minor.

When he gets to Jerusalem he is asked to participate in a “vow” with four other men,

which involved his staying in the Temple for seven days.

He is spotted in the temple by some Jews from Asia that had been acquainted with Paul’s ministry and is accused of bringing a Gentile (Trophimus) into the Temple, which he had not done.

A riot breaks out in the Temple, and Paul is thrust out, and would have been beaten to death had not the chief captain, Claudius Lysius, rescued him.



When we get to chapter 23, we learn that there was an assassination plot made by over 40 men who had vowed to neither eat nor drink until Paul was dead,

Claudius Lysius then sneaks Paul out of the city by night under the guard of 470 soldiers. He is brought first to Antipatris, and finally to Caesarea where he will appear before Governor Felix.

Felix calls for the religious leadership from Jerusalem to come and present their case before Paul, and where Paul could plead his defense, but the trial is delayed because the governor wants the chief captain to come and testify also. While Paul is there in Caesarea he has the opportunity to witness to the governor, but although Felix is obviously under conviction, he does not trust Christ.

The trial never resumes seemingly because the governor is waiting for somebody to pay him off, so Paul remains incarcerated in Caesarea for two years.

At the very end of chapter 24, we learned that Felix has been removed from being governor and is replaced by a man named Porcius Festus.

I. Festus Promptly Comes to Jerusalem (vs. 1 – 6)

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

Notice – “after three days” – he made it a priority to visit Jerusalem. Relations between the Roman government and the people of Jerusalem were strained at best. Festus wanted to promptly visit the religious leaders there, no doubt to see if he could improve them.

Notice – “ascended” – Jerusalem was up on a mountain.

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

One of the items high on the priority list of the High Priest and the rest of the Sanhedrin was the death of the Apostle Paul. The new high priest was Ishmael; he had replaced Jonathan who had been killed by Felix.¹ Paul had been held at Caesarea for the last two years awaiting the conclusion of the trial. The Jewish leaders are feeling Festus out to see if perhaps Festus would give them what they wanted – Paul’s head on a platter.

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

Their plan was that they would have the governor call for Paul, and while he was being transported from Caesarea to Jerusalem, they would have an assassin planted along the

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 503). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

route to kill Paul. Remember, there was a group of men that had promised to fast until Paul was dead. After two years of fasting, they must have been getting pretty hungry. ☺

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

Festus seems to be playing a shrewd political game. He does not grant their request, telling them that he was “departing shortly” for Caesarea.

"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 25:5)

He makes the religious leaders join him back to Caesarea, and there they will resume the trial.

"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." (Acts 25:6)

Notice that he does not leave for Caesarea for ten days, which means he was being disingenuous about his “departing shortly”. He had to show these leaders from Jerusalem that he was in charge, and though he wanted to “do them a pleasure”, it would be on his terms.

II. Festus’ Proposal Causes Paul to Appeal to Caesar (vs. 7 – 12)

"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." (Acts 25:7)

The original accusation that was made against Paul was that he brought Trophimus, a Gentile, into the Temple. The men (the Jews from Asia – Acts 21:27 – 29) who supposedly witnessed this were not there to testify against Paul, and thus the accusations could not be proven. Paul should have been immediately released but because of the political tension between the Roman government and the Jewish people, the governor refused to do so.

"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." (Acts 25:8)

Paul declares his complete innocence in the matter. He states that he has neither violated God's Law, nor the man-made traditions of the Jewish people, nor the laws of the Roman government.

"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?" (Acts 25:9)

Festus is yielding to the pressure of the Sanhedrin, and tries to convince Paul to go to Jerusalem, which seems to be completely unnecessary. Why go to Jerusalem? Everyone needed to conduct a fair trial was present. It is not clear that Festus was complicit in the assassination plot, but he does push for Paul's trial being moved to Jerusalem.

"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. 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." (Acts 25:10-11)

Paul sees the writing on the wall, and realizes he is being set up. He has rights as a Roman citizen, and he exercises the right to appeal his case to the highest secular court of the land, Caesar's.

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

Festus can now wash his hands of the case. He agrees to allow Paul to present his case in Rome. The Sanhedrin could not be upset with him, because they knew that his hands were now tied.

III. Festus Privately Confers with King Agrippa (vs. 13 – 22)

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

King Agrippa and his sister Bernice visit Caesarea to officially welcome Festus as the new governor. Agrippa, often referred to as Agrippa II to distinguish him from his father, Agrippa I, was the great grandson of Herod the Great. Because he had found favor with both Emperor Claudius and Emperor Nero, he had been granted rule over an extensive territory. He had two sisters, Drusilla (the wife of Felix) and Bernice. Rumors persisted that he lived for several years in an incestuous relationship with

Bernice. Like his father before him, he had the right to appoint the high priests. As a result, he had considerable knowledge of the inner workings of Jewish ecclesiastical politics. It was perhaps for this reason that Festus called on him for advice about Paul.²

Agrippa's relationship to his sister Bernice was something of a scandal in its day. A year younger than her brother, she could perhaps be described as a "Jewish Cleopatra." She had been married at age thirteen to her uncle, Herod of Chalcis. When her husband/uncle died in a.d. 48 and her brother Herod was granted rule over Chalcis, she moved in with him and remained his constant companion for many years. The rumors were rampant that they were maintaining an incestuous relationship. In a.d. 63 she married King Polemon of Cilicia, perhaps to avert the rumors, but she doesn't seem to have lived with him for long. She accompanied Agrippa to Rome in the early 70s and quickly became the mistress of Titus, the emperor Vespasian's son. The relationship created a major scandal in Roman patrician circles. Titus evidently wanted to marry her, but marriage to a Jewess was not socially acceptable; when he became emperor himself in a.d. 79, he was forced to abandon his liaison with her.³

Festus will eventually get around to telling Agrippa privately about a notable prisoner that he has incarcerated, named Paul.

"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

² Wade, J. W. (1987). *Acts: Unlocking the Scriptures for You* (p. 259). Cincinnati, OH: Standard.

³ Polhill, J. B. (1995). *Acts* (Vol. 26, p. 493). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." (Acts 25:14-19)

Notice the real problem that underlined all the accusations against Paul – he was preaching about a resurrected Christ.

"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." (Acts 25:20-21)

Note – Augustus is a title that means “the august one”, and it is not a proper name. Nero was the emperor from 54 – 68 AD. We know Nero to be a very brutal dictator, as well as a psychopath, but at this point in his reign he had not yet demonstrated these traits.

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

King Agrippa now gets involved in the case, and although Paul had already appealed unto Caesar, Herod still wants to hear what he has to say.

IV. Festus Publicly Commences the Unofficial Hearing (vs. 23 – 27)

"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." (Acts 25:23)

Here is where Festus will publicly (pomp - φαντασία *phantasia* – meaning a big, public display) introduce Paul to King Agrippa, and other “chief captains, and principal men of the city.” The word for chief captains is χιλιάρχος (*chiliarchos*), meaning a leader of 1000 soldiers. There were, no doubt, some of the local Jewish leaders of the synagogue also present.

"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."

(Acts 25:24-27)

Festus states that by bringing him before Agrippa who was knowledgeable in the laws and traditions of the Jewish people, he could better understand Paul's case, and thereby be better equipped to write to Caesar regarding the accusations made against Paul.

Conclusion - Practical Thoughts

1. **The devil is resourceful** – and his best resources are people. You can be doing the right thing, for the right reason, and still be falsely accused and attacked by people.

The devil is trying to destroy you – he wants to sift you like wheat, and he will use people to do that. He wants you out of commission, especially if you love the Lord Jesus and are laboring to lead others to Christ. Don't be surprised if enemies begin to surface as you are trying to do what you believe God has called you to do.

"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." (Luke 6:26)

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12)

2. **The devil twists reality** – Think of the hypocrisy of this circus. Herod and Bernice are involved in a scandalous, incestuous relationship, but they are sitting here with all of this "pomp", casting judgment upon one of the most righteous human beings that ever existed.
3. **The devil is relentless** – he will not give up. You would have thought that after two years, the Sanhedrin would have quit their mission to have Paul put to death, but here they are still attacking, still accusing, and still plotting against Paul.
4. **The devil is restricted**. Notice how God kept his hand upon Paul and protected him from being destroyed by Satan, and these wicked members of the Sanhedrin. God is bigger than the devil. He will protect you as you are doing His will. Jesus already told Paul that he would testify of Him at Rome (Acts 23:11); and nothing the devil attempted to do would change that.