

Acts of the Apostles - Chapter 25 (NIV)

Paul before Festus

25:1 Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. 2 And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him, 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).

At the end of Chapter 24, there was a change in governor of Judea, Porcius Festus took over for Felix. It has been more than two years since Paul was brought to Caesarea. This time the governor went to Jerusalem to see the Jewish leaders. It says that the governor traveled to Jerusalem after being in Caesarea for three days. He must have been in good health to head out so quickly. He would still have had to travel back to Caesarea. It was 70 miles and would take about 24 hours to walk there. Since he was governor of Judea, Jerusalem would have been the largest and most important city in his province.

In the past two years, the hearts of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were still hardened against Paul. They still wanted him killed. Either put to death by the Romans or murdered by the Jews. The Jewish leaders wanted Festus to transfer Paul to Jerusalem as a favor to them so they could ambush him along the way. Remember in Acts 23 that the Asian Jews started the riot in Jerusalem. They wanted Paul dead. This time it is the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem who are plotting to kill Paul.

“These were religious men, religious leaders. Their actions show the danger of religion that is not in true contact with God. If your religion makes you a liar and a murderer, there is something wrong with your religion.” (Guzik)

*25:4 Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly. 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.” 6 After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea,*

Festus asked them to send a few leaders to Caesarea. This would be the third time that Paul stood before the leaders of the Sanhedrin as a Christian. List who had brought Paul before the leadership and where it had happened.

- a. Commander Lysias in Jerusalem
- b. Governor Felix in Caesarea
- c. Governor Festus in Caesarea

We have to believe that God is watching out for Paul because the Roman governors wanted to appease or satisfy the Jewish leaders and they are not seeking justice for Paul. Since the Jewish leaders could not come up with solid evidence against Paul, Festus could not do anything with Paul.

25:6b and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. 7 After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove,

Once again Paul was on trial before a Roman ruler and he stands accused by the Jewish leaders. Paul's life was hanging in the balance because if he is found guilty then he will be put to death. Just as in the previous trial, the Jewish leaders cannot provide any proof that Paul has done anything wrong. Remember that Pontius Pilate was willing to put Jesus to death without any proof that he had done anything wrong. Fortunately Festus is not that willing to appease the Jews.

"Many in the Bible were the target of false accusations (such as Joseph and Daniel). Yet in another sense, every follower of Jesus is the target of false accusations by *the accuser of the brethren* (Revelation 12:10). Thankfully, Jesus is our defense against condemnation and false accusation (Romans 8:33-34 – "33 *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.* 34 *Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*" (Guzik)

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." 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?"

Paul starts his defense by saying that he has done nothing wrong against:

1. the Jewish law
2. the temple
3. Caesar

Again Festus wants to do a favor for the Jewish leaders. He asks Paul to go to Jerusalem for another trial. Just as it was with Governor Felix, the best Paul can hope for is to push the trial to an impartial ruler.

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

Paul's response to the question of going before the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem was (NKJV), "*I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know.*" Paul must realize that:

- a. Festus does not want to rule on this trial.
- b. Festus will do almost anything to make the Jews happy.
- c. Festus knows Paul has done nothing wrong.
- d. Festus is looking for a way out

Paul argues to keep this trial in the Roman court. It is interesting how the Romans are the unwelcome enemy and Paul was safer with them than with his own people.

"Paul appealed specifically to Caesar Nero, who was later an notorious enemy of Christians. But the first five years of his reign, under the influence of good men around him, Nero was regarded as a

wise and just ruler. Paul had no reason at this time to believe that Nero would be anti-Christian.” (Guzik)

Festus gladly passes Paul’s trial up the chain to the Emperor in Rome. This is where God told him he would ultimately testify in Acts 23:11.

25:13 Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus. 14 While they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying, “There is a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix; 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 against him.

King Agrippa and his wife, Bernice came to Caesarea to welcome Governor Festus to Judea. Festus talks to him about Paul. Bernice was actually Agrippa’s younger sister. They could have the relationship because her husband (also her uncle) had died. This looks a lot like Pontius Pilate trying to get someone else to rule about Jesus.

*25:16 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. 17 So after they had assembled here, I did not delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought before me. 18 When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting, 19 but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. 20 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. 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.” 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” he *said, “you shall hear him.”*

Festus gives a detailed account of what has happened with Paul since Festus came to Caesarea. It does not look as though the Romans have a rulebook that tells them how to deal with these problems because Festus says “I was at a loss on how to investigate such matters.”

The words “a certain Jesus” show that Festus didn’t know much about Jesus. It is good to remember that the great and important people of Paul’s day didn’t know much about Jesus, and they had to be told. “Brethren, this is why we must keep on preaching Jesus Christ, because he is still so little known. The masses of this city are as ignorant of Jesus as Festus was.” (Spurgeon)

It looks as though Festus is looking for someone to say that he has handled things correctly. After being brought up to date on Paul’s case, King Agrippa wants to hear for himself.

Paul before Agrippa

*23 So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 Festus *said, “King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you see 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. 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. 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. 27 For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

King Agrippa and his wife entered with great pomp. There was what Dr. Luke described as a parade of commanders and high ranking city officials. Then Paul was brought in to the auditorium.

"Most everyone present – excepting, possibly, the Apostle Paul – was wrong in their estimation of who was important and who was not. Paul had an authority and a dignity greater than any of the important people at this hearing." (Guzik)

Governor Festus announces to everyone present that the Jews want Paul dead but Festus cannot find any fault with Paul. He tells them that he is going to send Paul to Rome to be judged by the Emperor but he doesn't know what to tell him the charges are against Paul. Governor Festus points out what Paul has been saying all along. The Jewish leaders have failed to produce any evidence or proof against Paul. He says that he thinks it is unreasonable to send Paul to the Emperor without specifying the charges against him. Festus is asking everyone present to help him specify the charges against Paul. Talk about "Mission Impossible". Your mission should you chose to accept it, is to come up with charges against a man who has been found innocent and these charges must end in his death. The trials against Paul have ended the same way that Jesus' trials ended. They all have ended with a Roman official scratching his head. Commander Lysias, Pontius Pilate, Governors Felix and Festus have said "I find no with fault this man." They all knew that anything less than death would not satisfy the Jews.