

## **THE BOOK OF ACTS**

### **CHAPTER 25**

#### **PAUL BEFORE FESTUS 25:1-27**

#### **THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE**

After being held unlawfully for two years in prison, Paul does not waver in his trust and confidence in God.

To God, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. However, from our human perspective, the passage of time sometimes seems like an enemy. Like Paul, we must not be moved from standing on God's promises to us. If God has spoken a promise to your heart, it will surely come to pass.

#### **JEWISH LEADERS APPEAL TO FESTUS (1-9)**

Once again, the Jews look for a way to get rid of Paul. They appeal to Festus to send Paul to Jerusalem. They think they can ambush and kill Paul on his journey. Instead, Festus determines that Paul should remain in Caesarea and states he will travel to Caesarea and reopen the case. After arriving at Caesarea, Festus orders Paul to be brought to him. The Jews present bring complaints against Paul, but he defends himself against their accusations.

Paul is confronted by Festus in Caesarea (Chapter 24) and then by Agrippa (Chapter 26). In Chapter 27, Paul travels to Rome, and in Chapter 28, he arrives. Festus will be used by the Jewish mob and change the decision of Felix. Everyone will try to kill Paul, but God will deliver him and send him to Rome.

Act 25:1 Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Festus is described by Josephus as a pleasant and fair ruler. But in this chapter, we see him swayed into breaking Roman laws when entertained by the Jews of Jerusalem.

Act 25:2 Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him,

For two years, the Jews have been festering over Paul, and they are furious. They look for any way to destroy him. Festus's plan to travel to Jerusalem represents their new hope. They have now built up a monumental case against Paul in their imaginations and accuse him of heresy. They also fabricate stories that are grossly exaggerated.

Act 25:3 asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.

And desired favour against him (Paul), that he (Festus) would send for him to (come to) Jerusalem, laying wait in (along) the way to kill him.

They ask that the case be reopened in Jerusalem, not to try Paul but to kill him. They are going to ambush Paul. Religion sponsors violence and murder to get its desired end. In verses 4 and 5, Festus demonstrates his wisdom.

Act 25:4 But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly.

Paul has undergone a trial by legal steps, and Caesarea is the proper place to be, but Festus now promises he will personally look into the situation when he gets there.

Act 25:5 "Therefore," he said, "let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him."

Festus says "If any irregularities exist, I will reopen the case." In the opening verses, he refuses to bring Paul to Jerusalem, but in verse 9 he will reverse himself, which causes Paul to take his case to Caesar. Paul sticks with Roman law. He knows that he will not receive a fair trial in Jerusalem with the Jews.

Act 25:6 And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.

And when he had tarried (diatribe: to wear down, remain, abide, continue) 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.

The Jews "wined and dined" Festus for more than ten days to influence him to turn Paul over to them.

Act 25:7 When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove,

These accusations have previously been made in Chapter 24. They are the same now, except more vicious after two years. They are still unfounded and cannot be proven.

Act 25:8 while he answered for himself, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all."

While he answered for (defended) Himself, neither against the law of the Jews (disturbing the peace, causing a riot), neither against (profaning) the temple, nor yet against Caesar (a revolt against Rome), have I offended anything at all.

Act 25:9 But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?"

Festus feels obligated to give the Jews a break in this case. He will now even break the law to please them.

## **PAUL REQUESTS AN AUDIENCE WITH CAESAR (10-12)**

Paul states he is a Roman citizen, therefore, under Roman law. He continues by declaring that if he has committed a crime worthy of death, so be it. Festus' response to Paul is to ask him if he has appealed to Caesar.

Act 25:10 So Paul said, "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 says, "I am under Roman law. Roman law found me innocent of Jewish accusations, and the charges have not been changed. I will stick with Roman law until released or sentenced." Festus knows Paul has done no wrong, even though he would not admit it.

**25:10 I have done no wrong**, *adikeo* (ad-ee-keh-oh); To do an injustice, to act criminally or unrighteously, to violate any human or divine law, to do wrong, to mistreat others. The word is a compound of *a*, "without," and *dike*, "right"; hence, an illegal action. *Adikeo* consists of offending legally, general wrongdoing, social injustice, and inflicting hurt or damage on individuals. In his appeal to Caesar, Paul declares his innocence.

Act 25:11 For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death (under Roman law), I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver be unto them. I appeal (*apikaleomai*: call on, appellate) unto Caesar.

Paul believes in capital punishment even for himself if he is guilty. Now under Roman law, he has removed himself from Festus and desires to go to the authority above Festus. Paul cannot go lower (back to Jewish court), but only higher, all the way to Caesar in Rome.

Act 25:12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

Festus finds himself in a tough situation. He has refused to acquit a Roman citizen who has no legal grounds for indictment. Paul has now appealed to go higher and Festus will have to write a letter that makes sense and justifies Paul's two years in prison and his stand in refusing to acquit Paul. Paul has played a trump card and called Festus's hand. Festus puts on his poker face and informs Paul he will let him go. Paul knows Roman law and uses it.

## **KING AGRIPPA AND BERNICE IN CAESAREA (13-21)**

King Agrippa and Bernice traveled to Caesarea to greet Festus. After being in Caesarea for many days, Festus explains Paul's situation to Agrippa.

Act 25:13 And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.

Herod Agrippa II, grandson of Herod the Great, nephew to Herod the Tetrarch (who beheaded John the Baptist) and son of Agrippa I (who killed James in chapter 12) is one of the most handsome men in the ancient world and the ruler of Rome. His sister Bernice is said to be the most beautiful woman of the ancient world. She is the sister of Drusilla. These two sisters continually fight to outdo each other. Bernice has left her husband and is living in incest with her brother Agrippa II. Later she will become the mistress of Vespasian who is ruling Jerusalem. She then becomes the mistress of the son of Vespasian, Titus.

Caesarea is the hometown of Agrippa and Bernice. It was built by their grandfather, and they want to visit the beautiful seaport city. For a long time they would not visit because Drusilla lived there with Felix. But now that Felix was gone, they don't have to be concerned about seeing Drusilla.

Act 25:14 When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix,

Festus wants Agrippa's opinion. They are at a party and apparently everyone is having a good time except Festus. He is bothered about what he has done with Paul and the letter he has to write. He knows how he should have released him, but did not. Now Paul has appealed to Caesar, and Festus is bothered. He brought up Felix's name because he knew how much Agrippa and Bernice hated him and Drusilla. He is basically telling them, "This is all Felix's fault."

Act 25:15 about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him.

For ten days Festus has been informing them about the situation. He has entertained and catered to both of them during this time and has given them a little bit of information.

Act 25:16 To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.'

Festus is trying to place himself in a good light. He is telling them of the greatness of Roman law, "You are innocent until proven guilty in a fair trial." Festus is being self-righteous. He is putting himself in a favorable light by twisting the facts of what happened. Festus has failed. Instead of admitting his failure, he is covering it with self-righteousness. It was God's will for Paul, before he sinned, to go to Rome and then on to Spain. Regardless of Paul's failure and repentance, God's will has not changed, only His means of getting Paul to Rome. He will use the excellent means of Roman law to get Paul there.

The weakness in leadership does not stop God. He uses it. God uses failures of others as stepping stones for His plans and His people. God uses any situation for His glory, as we should (Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 7:20-21). If Festus or Felix had used Roman law correctly, they would have allowed Paul to leave much sooner. If they had, Paul would have proceeded to Rome. Regardless of the motives of Felix and Festus in detaining Paul, God will still get Paul to Rome at Rome's expense. On the way, Paul will write some of his greatest epistles. He will also be protected from religious Jews by the Roman military

Act 25:17 Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in.

He is bragging on his efficiency to minimize his own mistakes. He is saying, "I did not waste any time." Roman law and the importance of quick justice; no delays for weeks and months causing people to forget the importance of the act of the facts surrounding the crime.

Act 25:18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed,

During his stay in Jerusalem he had been convinced by the Jews of Paul's guilt. He is now admitting that he has presupposed Paul's guilt but has found out otherwise during the trials because the Jews are actually upset over religious doctrine. Festus knows Agrippa has an understanding of the Jewish religion and can help him straighten out this matter.

Act 25:19 but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

But had certain questions against him of their own superstition (deisidaimonia: to fear a demon), and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

We now find out what the trials were like. Festus heard the gospel preached by Paul. He heard of Jesus and the resurrection. The resurrection is the point of contention with the Jews and the point of salvation for Festus (Romans 10:9-10). "Affirmed" means Paul is dogmatic about Jesus being alive.

Act 25:20 And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters.

And because I doubted (was perplexed) of such a manner of questions (the controversy), I asked him whether (if) he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.

This is a lie. Festus felt obligated to the Jews (verse 9) and tried to get Paul to Jerusalem because of his promise to them.

Act 25:21 But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar."

In other words, he is saying "I need help."

### **AGRIPPA REQUESTS PAUL TO BE BROUGHT BEFORE HIM (22-27)**

After hearing the Paul's case from Festus, Agrippa requests to hear Paul for himself. Paul is then brought before Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice.

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

This is exactly what Festus wants to hear. Agrippa is pleased to straighten out something Felix has started.

Act 25:23 So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in.

And on the morrow (next morning), when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp (phantasia: glamour, vain show), and was entered into the place of hearing, with chief captains (high-ranking Roman generals), and principal men (officials) of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

Agrippa and Bernice represent the fourth generation of Herods who have rejected the gospel. They are also the last of the Herodian line.

Herod the Great had rejected the gospel when he slaughtered the children in an effort to get rid of Jesus shortly after his birth. Herod's son, Antipas, (named after his grandfather Antipater), murdered John the Baptist. The third-generation, Herod Agrippa I, had James killed and Peter thrown into prison. Herod Agrippa II is now presented with an opportunity to accept the Lord as Paul ministers to Him. However he and Bernice reject Jesus Christ and die, effectively ending the Herodian line.

When word spread that Agrippa and Bernice were in town and this brilliant man was going to officiate the law, he drew a crowd of dignitaries from Roman and local government circles. Paul will now be brought into this very glamorous occasion before the highest of dignitaries to present his case and the gospel. Paul will hear an introduction to his own case, which will include hypocrisy. Festus will whitewash the case to protect his own image.

Act 25:24 And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer.

And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man (Paul), about whom all the multitude of the Jews (Sanhedrin) have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here (at Caesarea), crying (screaming) that he ought not live any longer.

Act 25:25 But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him.

Festus is saying, "When I carefully examined him by the law, I could find nothing wrong with this man. He personally appealed to Caesar and I have given Paul my permission to appeal to him."

Act 25:26 I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write.

Of whom I have no certain (exact) thing to write unto my lord (Caesar). Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and especially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

Festus is telling the courtroom of his dilemma. His letter at this point will have no concrete case to present, and his weakness and mishandling of the case will eventually come out through investigation. He could also lose his job.

Act 25:27 For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

For it seemeth to me unreasonable (useless) to send a prisoner, and not withal (clearly) to signify (explain) the crimes laid against him.

Paul now stands before this great Roman assembly. There is Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice along with city and state officials from the area. Paul will now share the gospel with this powerful group of unbelievers.