

## Acts 25

If one were to compare Festus and Felix morally, secular history tells that Festus was by far the better man. However, Felix was more "in the know" of the people he governed. He had "more exact knowledge concerning the Way" (24:22). When Festus arrived in Judaea, replacing Felix who had been recalled to Rome, he remained but briefly in Caesarea, the seat of his government. He went to Jerusalem to survey conditions there. Ruling that troublesome province was no easy task for any Roman. No governor could ignore Jerusalem if he expected to rule with any degree of success.

So, when Festus arrived the "chief priests and the principal men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they besought him, asking a favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem..." (25:2f). Festus was naive. Caesarea WAS where his judgment seat was, the legitimate place for Paul to be tried, but what harm could come to grant this "small" request of theirs'?! He had to try to get along with his subjects. Still, Festus would not immediately grant their wish. He told them that they send those who were of power and go with him to Caesarea and "if there is anything amiss in the man, let them accuse him" (25:5).

His visit in Jerusalem was brief (8-10 days) and on the morrow after returning to Caesarea, he called for Paul to be brought before him (25:6). Jews had come down from Jerusalem and stood round about Paul and brought many grievous charges which they could not prove (25:7). Luke does not tell whether these men had accepted Festus' invitation to go with him to Caesarea, or whether they traveled separately, but how ever they traveled, they were there to accuse Paul. Paul answered their charges "neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar, have I sinned at all!" (25:8).

The Jews' seemingly innocent request was still in Festus' mind. He asked Paul "Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things before me?" (Acts 25:9). Festus' question reveals he was aware of Paul's Roman citizenship and that a change in venue of the place of Paul's trial had to be agreeable with Paul. But, after all, did not the accusers charges stem from primarily matters which concerned Jerusalem? What better place to learn the real facts? Festus was naive and obviously ignorant as to why Paul had been rushed from Jerusalem to Caesar to begin with. He would learn that these religious fanatics had no scruples against murder and would use any ploy they might to have Paul removed

to Jerusalem so that along the way they could assassinate him. What wicked and ungodly acts are done in the name of religion!

If Festus was ignorant of the Jews' intentions, Paul was not. He knew he had averted death two or three years earlier when his nephew alerted him of the plot of more than 40 men who planned to ambush and kill him. He knew the Jews had no real case against him so far as crime against the Roman government was concerned. Had not the chief captain admitted as much? (22:29). He despaired of justice at the hand of Festus for Festus also knew that he had done no wrong to the Jews (25:10). Paul was determined he would not go back to Jerusalem. He knew such would be an invitation to death. There was only one recourse. He would exercise his Roman citizen and appeal to Caesar to personally hear his case. So Paul said "I am standing before Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou also very well knowest. If then I am a wrong-doer or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if none of those things is true whereof they accuse me, no man can give me up to them. I appeal unto Caesar" (25:10f). This was a Roman citizen's right and when such an appeal was made, the trial immediately stopped and all participants, the aggrieved ones and those whom they charged, were transported to Rome.

Very likely Festus had no expectation that events would proceed as they did. Perhaps he expected to release Paul after a trial in Jerusalem, but he would have shown his patience with his subjects by granting them what concession he could. Whatever, his indecisiveness led to a real dilemma for him. After conferring with the council, he said to Paul, "Thou hast appealed unto Caesar: unto Caesar shalt thou go."

Things were now in motion for Paul, after a long, weary interval of imprisonment in Caesarea. It had been a dark hour in Jerusalem after he had been taken into custody and had spoken twice to unbelieving Jews about why he acted as he did (both of which addresses ended with an uproar on the part of the Jews). But in that dark hour the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer for as thou hast testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so must thou also bear witness at Rome" (23:11).

How long Paul remained in Caesarea after his appeal to Caesar is not specifically stated. Luke says "certain days". Festus had important guests from the Herod family who came to greet and welcome him to Judaea: Agrippa and his sister Bernice. The Herod family had long played a significant role in Jewish affairs in this period, both "between the

Testaments" and well into the first century. It was now well into the seventh decade of the first century and since Herod the great ruled at the time of Jesus' birth (and nearly 40 years earlier); the family had figured prominently in Jewish affairs for 80-90 years and would for some time thereafter. Agrippa was the great-grandson of Herod the Great. He ruler over a large portion of Judaea and other regions around the province. His sister Drusilla was the wife of Felix and Bernice, another sister, which is such close companionship with him that they were accused of incest. He visit to Festus was an act of courtesy, welcoming this Roman Governor to his seat which had been vacated when his brother-in-law, Felix, had been recalled to Rome.

After Agrippa and Bernice had tarried there "many days," Festus opened the question of Paul to him. Festus' quandary was an embarrassing one. He had a person whom he was sending to Rome, yet he had no specific charge to lay against him! (25:26) Festus knew that the charge against Paul were no evil thing, but "had certain questions against him of their own religion" (25:18). Then, too, Festus did not understand their disagreement about "one Jesus, who was dead whom Paul affirmed was alive" (Acts 25:18). Festus' ignorance was showing. Agrippa must have secretly smiled at this confession of Festus. Agrippa was certainly "in the know". He had authority over the Jerusalem temple. Agrippa would know the nature of the religious charges against Paul and he was familiar with the man Jesus. He expressed his wish to hear Paul. Festus readily granted Agrippa's request when he said, "Tomorrow, thou shalt hear him!" (25:22).

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