

THE ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 25:1 – 26:32 More injustice in the courts

*How did the new Roman governor treat Paul?

*Who was the grandson of the man who tried to kill baby Jesus?

*What is the purpose of our lives as Christians?

Introduction

As we enter Acts chapter 25, remember that Paul has already been unjustly imprisoned for two years after his trial with the Roman governor Felix (chapter 24). Before that, he had barely escaped from a trial and a plot against his life by the Jews (chapter 23). Before that, he had to defend himself before a Jewish crowd demanding his death (chapter 22). The repetition of these unfair trials emphasizes the injustice that Paul suffered. Yet Paul persevered, realizing that he was suffering because of the cause of Christ (23:6).

Acts 25:1-12

Paul before Festus

Felix's new replacement, Porcius Festus, arrived in Judea, the province that he was going to govern. Just a few days later, he decided to meet with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, since he wanted to start off on the right foot with the people he was going to rule. The Jews, even after two years, were still fuming about Paul, which indicates that Paul had been using the small degree of freedom that he had while imprisoned (24:23) to continue preaching the gospel. They requested that Paul be brought to stand trial in Jerusalem. That was not the real plan they had in mind, however; the Jews didn't mean to let Paul slip away again, and secretly were going to ambush and kill him on the way. Festus, though, would not give in, and set the trial up in Caesarea.

The day after his return to Caesarea, Festus presided over the trial. Just as before, the Jews accused Paul of committing offenses against the Law of Moses, the Jews, the temple, and even Caesar. But Paul simply pointed out that they could not prove any of the charges. Festus knew well that Paul had done nothing wrong. However, his desire to please the Jews was so strong that he was willing to give Paul over to their hands for a trial in Jerusalem.

Paul knew he would not make it out of such a trial alive. The Jews nearly tore him to pieces in the last trial in Jerusalem (23:10), and then plotted to kill him afterwards (23:12)! And he also realized, from his experiences with Felix and Festus, that the Romans would not be just enough to release him, either. So, he went to his last resort: he appealed to Caesar. As a Roman citizen, he had this right to appeal his case to the highest court, that of the emperor Nero (who was not against Christianity at this time). Festus agreed, since this solution relieved him of his responsibility to decide the case.

Acts 25:13-26:1 Paul is not done yet!

Not long after this, another twist of events happened. Agrippa and Bernice, a local king and his sister, came to greet the new Roman governor of Judea. During the visit, Festus let Agrippa know about the curious case of Paul and the Jews. Festus, of course, was very confused; he knew nothing about the points of this religious gripe or why the Jews were so upset simply because Paul believed someone had risen from the dead.

Agrippa, on the other hand, was from a family that had ruled in Judea for

several generations (his grandfather, Herod the Great, was the one who tried to kill Jesus in His infancy in Matthew 2:16). He was much more familiar with Jewish customs, and was interested enough in this case to hear it himself. So, the next day Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, and a great number of spectators came to listen to Paul defend himself. Festus said that the purpose of the hearing was to determine exactly what charges against Paul should be mentioned to the emperor, but the circumstances made it seem more like a show to entertain Festus's guests.

Acts 26:2-23 Paul before Agrippa

Once more, Paul is forced to defend himself. Patiently, step by step, Paul will again tell the story of his life and his life-change. There are four parts to Paul's speech:

1. *Paul addresses Agrippa with an introduction* (verses 2-3)
2. *Paul recounts his former life* (verses 4-11). As we have seen before, Paul was a zealous Jew that persecuted Christians. But even at this time in his life, he had a hope in God's power to save Israel and to raise the dead. Paul points out to the Jews listening that they should not be surprised that God accomplished both things at once — in Jesus!
3. *Paul describes his encounter with Jesus* (verses 12-18). The change in Paul's life was not his idea! The same Lord he had opposed appeared to him and told him his mission.
4. *Paul tells how his life changed, and thus why he is persecuted* (verses 19-21). In obedience to heaven, Paul preached the message of Christ. For this reason alone — not because of any crime — Paul ended up seized in the temple.

Paul summarizes his case in verses 22 and 23. He received help from God and preached the gospel: Christ's death and resurrection. His message was only what the Bible said would happen!

Note: "Testifying both to small and great"

Paul's defense seems to summarize chapters 9-20 of the book of Acts. In a sense, this scene is the climax of the whole book. Acts tells us how the gospel of Christ reached the whole world through the testimony of the apostles. Jesus declared to the apostles all the way at the beginning, "you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Paul here, in parallel language, states that he "declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20). Christ's purpose has therefore been accomplished. Paul has testified about Christ to men, women, Jews, Gentiles, rich, and poor — and now he will do so before a king. Paul brings new meaning to Psalm 119:46: "I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, And will not be ashamed."

Are we fulfilling Jesus' purpose for our lives? He has made Christians "His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). If we fail to talk with others about Christ, we fail on the mission that He has given us. Let us be bold like Paul!

Acts 26:24-32 Agrippa responds

It became clear to Festus that Paul was truly convinced of Christ's resurrection. Yet he could not understand how a man who could so ably defend himself in court could believe in such a preposterous notion. He concluded that Paul must have gone insane after all the education he received. Paul shrugged off the statement and instead directed himself to Agrippa, asking him if he believed the prophets that spoke concerning Christ. Agrippa responded — perhaps sarcastically, perhaps seriously — that he was not far from being convinced.

Paul did not even bother to ask for his freedom. His true purpose in that hearing and anywhere else was to help everyone become what he was: a Christian, saved by the grace of God. All the same, the officials agreed that Paul was innocent, and might have

been freed if he had not appealed to Caesar. In the end, Paul's appeal to Caesar might simply have been the Lord's way of getting Paul to Rome (recall His promise in Acts 23:11). We'll see in the final two chapters that the road to Rome was just as bumpy as all of the trials Paul endured.

Note: Which one are we?

The chief characters in this chapter give us examples of three different human hearts.

- *Festus is a man who hears some ideas about the gospel, but never bothers to seriously investigate it. The message never means anything more to him than "a certain dead, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive" (25:19). To him, anyone that believes in such an idea must be "mad" (26:24).*
- *Agrippa is a man who learns about Christ because "I would like to hear the man myself" (25:22). In other words, the concept is interesting, and his curiosity drives him to listen. There are several possibilities for such a man. He may get bored and drop the subject altogether. He may consider the evidence enough to truly say, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian" (26:28), but never fully commit. Or, he may seek God with a sincere heart and eventually become a disciple of Christ.*
- *Paul is a man who has always sought to obey God (26:5), even humbling himself to change when he learns that he was wrong (26:15, 19). He has boldness to defend His faith.*

We see each of these people around us in our lives. But which do people see in us?

Choose the right answer:

- ___ 1. Who was the new Roman governor of Judea? a) Felix, b) Claudius Lysias, c) Porcius Festus, or d) Ananias.
- ___ 2. What king came to pay Festus a visit and decided to hear Paul's case during his stay? a) Agrippa, b) Herod the Great, c) David, or d) Nero.
- ___ 3. What did Paul not say in the course of his defense? a) I have always trusted in God's promises, b) I changed because the Lord told me to, c) I am only here because I preach the gospel, or d) I should be freed.
- ___ 4. Who said, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian"? a) Festus, b) Agrippa, c) Paul, or d)

True or false:

- ___ 1. Festus immediately saw that Paul was innocent and freed him from prison.
- ___ 2. Paul refused to stand trial in Jerusalem and instead appealed his case to Caesar.
- ___ 3. Paul did not have enough courage to mention the name of Jesus to King Agrippa.
- ___ 4. Festus assumed that Paul had gone insane because of his all his education.

The person who sent this lesson to you will be happy to correct your answers and discuss any questions you have with you. Send your responses and your contact information to:

Or, to:
Acts Bible lesson
Church of Christ
258 Highland Avenue
Piscataway, NJ 08854

Or, by email, to:

beeubanks@juno.com