Text: Acts 25
Title: Paul's Third and Fourth Hearings
Truth: Paul uses the legal means at his disposal to save his life from persecutors.
Date/Location: Wednesday 4/23/2014 and 4/30/2025, 5/7/2025

Introduction

Two years later…justice has still not been served in Paul's case. The Jewish leadership has a long and embittered memory against Paul and just cannot let go of their vendetta against him, so they try to induce the new governor to submit to their plan which was to kill Paul (v. 3).

The chapter begins with Paul's third trial or hearing (second before Roman officials). The first was before the San Hedrin in Jerusalem (Acts 22:30); the second before Felix (Acts 24); and this one before Festus and Agrippa (Acts 25). He gave his defense one other time, in front of the mob (Acts 22), and he will do so one more time before Agrippa (Acts 26). for a total of five occasions where he had the opportunity to defend himself publicly. He has one more after those in a less formal environment (Acts 28) for a grand total of six.

What can we learn from this section of Luke's history? **For one thing**, this severe difficulty lasted for a long time in Paul's life. We might have to endure similar things because our Lord has not exempted us from such things. In fact, these things are reflections of the world's hatred for Him, and He uses them for our benefit to make us more like Him. **For another** thing, the machinations that the world uses against believers are unfair and unrighteous. We should not expect any better from them because that is their basic character.

I. Festus Seems More Decisive, 1-6a

Festus went up to Jerusalem to acquaint himself with the people and circumstances in that important part of his domain.

A. The Jews had a one-track mind. Paul was ruining them in the theological war, and they wanted Paul dead. They could not win in the realm of truth and ideas, so they resorted to planned and unlawful violence.

B. Festus decisively answered that Paul would be kept where he was and that a trial would be held quickly for him at that location.

C. About 10 days later, Festus went down to Caesarea and the next day had a trial for Paul. It seems that he was intending to clean up this mess hanging over from the previous administration.

II. Trial before Festus, v. 6b-12

A. The Jews made serious charges but could prove none of them. This should have finished the trial right there.

B. Paul defended himself by testifying that he did not break the Jewish law, the temple law, nor Roman law. He is making a plea: innocent!

C. Festus suggests a change of venue because he wanted to do the Jews a favor (pacify them? win brownie points, so to speak?) It seems that Festus said he would hear the case in Caesarea in order to have an appearance of propriety, but he planned to do the Jews a favor all along.

1. If Festus could decide in Jerusalem, it is obvious that he could do so in Caesarea too. He did not need any more information.

2. Why would he delay the decision? He wanted to curry favor of the influential people over whom he would be ruling in the coming year(s). In effect, Festus planned to hand the decision over to the Jews on the council in Jerusalem, and Paul knew how that would end.

3. Festus was no better than Felix before him. Perhaps Felix had briefed him on this situation, among others in the region and suggested an approach that would "keep the peace."

D. This was not acceptable to Paul because he was not going to compromise with murderers, so he asserted his right as a Roman citizen to be tried before the court in Rome. Legally he was right. He reaffirmed that he did the Jews no wrong (true), confronts Festus that Festus knows it, and says that if he did do something worthy of death, he does not object to that penalty. But he appeals to Caesar. Once again, Paul makes use of his rights as a Roman citizen.

1. It may seem strange to us that Paul did not press Festus for his decision on the matter, but Festus had already tipped his hand by making the suggestion in the first place. His favor to the Jews was one that would lead to Paul's death. Paul had to appeal to another judge who might be able to render a just decision, and to stay out of the hands of the murderous Jewish leaders.

2. The original issue that Paul was appealing was hardly worth appeal; it should have been dismissed as I have said multiple times already. But the appeal was worthwhile because the situation had blown up because it dragged on for years and, bigger picture, was a matter of whether a Christian could live and practice his faith in the Roman

empire without being accosted by others. The issue was now "bigger" than Paul.

E. The appeal to Caesar was now made and, in effect, set in stone. Festus could not do anything about it under Roman law and now had to effectively recuse himself. He successfully avoided deciding on the case.

III. Examination before Agrippa and Festus, v. 13-27

A. Pre-Trial Preparation, v. 13-22

1. Herod Agrippa II is the king here. He was brother of Drusilla who we read about in 24:24. He is the son of the Herod who killed James and tried to kill Peter and who died an ugly death because he would not recognize God (Acts 12). Previous generations of family members ruled as Herod in the gospels and at the time of Jesus's birth.

2. Bernice was Herod's sister. They were not married, but were in an illicit relationship and it was well known.

3. Festus describes the case, v. 14-21 by saying that the accusations had to do with some religious questions that were not part of Roman law's jurisdiction. That the charges were woefully short of what was necessary to kill a man was obvious. They should have been thrown out entirely. But he said that he was "uncertain" and so he was going to "refer" Paul to Jerusalem for trial, but Paul refused.

4. Agrippa replies that he would hear the man himself, v. 22.

B. Introduction to the Trial, v. 23-27

1. Much of what happened the next day was merely for show.

2. Festus introduced the case to the "public" present there – rulers, commanders, prominent men of the city – by saying that the Jews wanted Paul dead, but Festus found he had done nothing that would deserve so harsh a punishment.

3. He wanted King Agrippa to help him by figuring out what to write to Caesar Augustus as to the exact charges that should be laid against the man. In other words, it had to do with the *question* that was being asked in the first place. Is Paul guilty of X? But "X" was not known, and what was known of X was certainly not a capital crime. His confusion shows his lack of moral clarity and leadership. And how this could be missed by all of his advisors is somewhat stunning.

4. Festus was right that sending a prisoner without charges was crazy. He might even get in trouble for doing so.

5. The examination ends up being another opportunity for Paul to explain his life and salvation testimony, and this extends through chapter 26.

Conclusion

A. We can get some wisdom from this history as to how our legal system should operate.

1. For one thing, we need righteous judges. People like Felix and Festus who pander to constituencies are not the kind of judges we need. Nor are those, like Agrippa, who are living in a sinful lifestyle fit to be judges.

2. Second, we need not only righteous judges, but those who can make decisions with moral clarity and leadership.

3. Third, there must be a cost imposed on those who charge a man with a crime but cannot back it up. This will remove the incentive for them to make false or frivolous claims. This principle is found in the Law of Moses (Deut. 19:15-20).

B. Notice how God in His sovereign arrangement of the affairs of men made it so that the upper class of Roman society was getting the gospel directly from the apostle. This would probably not have happened had Paul knocked on their door in cold-calling fashion ☺.

C. We learn about the long-term perversity of the human heart. The Jews were bent on killing Paul. Why didn't they just forget Paul and go about living their lives? They were depraved sinners and acted that out.

D. Which character in this story are you most like? Assuming the answer to be Paul, how would you hold up if you were in his shoes? Would you handle the imprisonment faithfully, or would you become unruly in your behavior? Would you entrust your keeping to God? Would you be patient and sober-minded? Would you rely upon the Lord's presence with you, as Paul did? Would you spend your time profitably, growing in grace and encouraging others in the faith (like by writing letters as Paul did)?

E. I come back to the notion of perseverance. Dear brothers and sisters, we must continue, like Paul, despite whatever trials come, to walk with the Lord, to testify of our faith, to evangelize, to advocate, and if necessary to use every legal means to promote the work of God. We are not obligated to become martyrs unnecessarily.

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