

Acts 25: Paul before Festus
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Observations

1. There are three versions of the story:
 - a) Luke's in 1-12, focusing on Festus' interaction with the Jews and with Paul;
 - b) Festus' to Agrippa, a nominally Jewish king with heavy Roman sympathies (spent first 17 years in Rome);
 - c) Festus to Gentile nobility in Caesarea.
2. Methodological note: When we have more than one version, study them for omissions, additions, and changes; these often show the emphasis of each one.
3. Outcome will give insight into Festus' character. Value of this:
 - a) Luke's way of showing in these chapters who is really on trial.
 - b) Equips us in dealing with unbelievers, who often show these traits.
 - c) A negative example for us; sins to avoid.

A. 1-3, 15, 24: The Jewish Request

1. Festus goes up to Jer. to see the chief priests and elders, but in 13-14 Agrippa, King of Chalcis (Lebanon), with Bernice his sister and mistress, comes to see him.
 - a) A hint at where the power really is: Jews > Festus > Agrippa!
 - b) Felix had been recalled to Rome for mismanagement; Festus doesn't want to make the same mistake.
 - c) Where Felix was looking for a bribe from Paul, Festus needs Jewish approbation.
2. 15 and 24 show different assessments of the Jewish attitude:
 - a) To Agrippa, a Jew, he represents them as politely asking for a proceeding,
 - b) but to the mostly Gentile court, he describes them as "crying out," emotional and unruly.
 - c) --> Contrast his real attitude toward them with his political one. He is not really their friend, but politically can't get around them. Ps 12:2 "They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: [with] flattering lips [and] with a double heart do they speak."

B. 4-6, 16, NULL: Festus' Answer

1. The last clause in 4 is parenthetical: "Festus answered that Paul would be kept in Caesarea. (He himself was about to return there quickly.) He said, 'Let those among you with influence go down with me'" That is, his intent was to be prompt.
2. In fact, it takes him "more than ten days" (6) to return to

Caesarea. What's happening during this time? Heavy Jewish lobbying.

C. 6-8, 17-19, NULL: The Hearing

1. Paul's response shows the same three categories of accusation that we saw in 24:5,6: heresy, sacrilege, sedition.
2. 17 suggests that Festus proceeded with all speed. In fact, we know from 6 and 14 that he has been dragging his feet, like Felix before him (24:27). --> Promptness!

Prov. 3:27 Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do [it]. 28 Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.

Le 19:13 Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob [him]: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

3. From Festus' account to Agrippa (17-18), note Paul's continued emphasis on the resuhe keeps laying the bait out; hopes to do more than just defend himself. "Be instant in season, out of season."
4. No record of the hearing in 23-27. Shouldn't have been necessary, since Felix had already held it, and Festus ought to have had a record of that. He certainly won't admit this glitch at the big show!

D. 9, 20, 25: Festus' Motive for the Sequel

The distinction among these three is most interesting.

1. Luke discerns that he is motivated by political concerns.
2. Festus tells Agrippa that he needed further clarification on Jewish teaching.
3. Festus tells the crowd that he has already discerned Paul's innocence!

Our immediate response is, "This isn't fair." That's right, it isn't, but it is the way the world and its unsaved denizens behave.

E. 9-12, 20-21, 25, The Appeal to Caesar

1. At the final hearing, he makes it seem as though Paul had already stubbornly and unnecessarily appealed to Caesar. Suggested by 26:32 as well!
2. In fact, 9-11 shows that he was forced into it.
 - a) From his nephew's earlier intelligence, Paul knew of the risk of traveling to Jerusalem;
 - b) And Festus should have known it as well, had he studied Paul's file, which must have included the letter from Claudius

Lysias, the military captain in Jerusalem! 23:30

3. Represents a major watershed in Paul's thinking. He realizes he cannot expect a fair hearing from the Jews; rejects them as the theocracy, and places himself under the protection of Rome.
4. Lessons for our conduct from Paul's appeal:
 - a) It's not wrong to take advantage of the privileges our society gives us. "Be wise as serpents, gentle as doves." Compare Paul with the Lord Jesus, who was no Roman citizen and had no such privilege of appeal.
 - b) In fact, this gets Paul where the Lord had told him he was going: to Rome.

F. Summary of the three stories:

1. To Agrippa: Felix left me with this sticky problem, and in spite of my best diligence, I don't have the background in your customs and religion to figure it out. Would you please help me?
2. To the grand court: Here's a man who hasn't done anything wrong that I can see, but the rabble Jews are for some inexplicable reason angry with him, and he's rashly appealed to Caesar; whatever shall I say about him? Attitude toward both Paul and the others is like the Roman legionnaires in the Asterix books toward the Gauls: "These Jews are crazy."
3. Luke's version: Festus is trying desperately to ingratiate himself with the real power base, the Jews, and will compromise both Roman justice and his own integrity to avoid getting into the problems that his predecessor did.

G. Summary of Paul's Captors

They are on trial in these chapters, as much as Paul is.

1. Claudius Lysias, the Chiliarch
 - a) Overly cruel; would have had Paul scourged just to extract a confession.
 - b) Deals the most honestly of all with Paul. Recognizes the danger from the Jews, and takes steps to protect Paul from them.
 - c) Weak, but basically an honorable man.
2. Felix:
 - a) Cares not at all for the Jews; could easily have released Paul.
 - b) But looks for a bribe, 24:26. It is his avarice that keeps Paul out of circulation.
3. Festus:
 - a) Fears the Jewish political influence, and seeks to conciliate them.
 - b) A procrastinator. Does not act promptly on unpopular tasks.

Summary

1. Be ready for people like this.
2. Don't be one of them yourself.
3. Recognize God's sovereign protection even in the face of such opposition.

Hymn: Christian, Dost Thou See Them?