

The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

Chapter 25

At the end of chapter 24, we are told that Paul was imprisoned in what was probably a dungeon at the praetorium in Caesarea for two years. This praetorium was originally built by King Herod as a personal palace. Later, the Romans claimed it for themselves as the headquarters of the Roman procurator or governor of the province of Judea. Felix, the Roman procurator or governor of Judah, simply never completed the legal process that we read about last time, in part because he was hoping for a bribe. But then, we are also told that he had been succeeded by Porcius Festus. The Roman historian Josephus records that in the year 60 A.D., Nero removed Felix from office because of complaints from the Jewish community against him.

25:1-12

When Festus became the new governor of Judea, he traveled to Jerusalem at the beginning of his term in office. There, the Jewish leadership showed that they were still preoccupied with the demise of Paul because they asked Festus to send him to Jerusalem. And the plot to assassinate him was still in place, given an opportunity such as transferring Paul in this manner.

- v. 4-5 – But Festus refused and told the Jewish leaders to bring their charges at Caesarea, which would be, once again, at the praetorium.
- v. 6-7 – As soon as Festus returned to Caesarea, the leaders brought their charges against Paul. It was a repeat of what transpired two years earlier when Felix was the governor. Once again, they could not prove their case.
- v. 8 – And, once again, Paul showed that he had done nothing wrong according to the Torah, he had not harmed the temple, and had not broken Roman law. This episode illustrates the way that believers can be righteous according to God’s Word and a good citizen where they live, and still face difficulty, even persecution.
- v. 9 – This passage shows how people whose values are worldly, not godly, will compromise justice. Instead of issuing a just decision based on the evidence presented (or lack thereof), Festus took a political route by trying to give the Jewish leaders what they wanted. In this case, if they got their way, the Jewish leadership would be indebted to Festus and he when he needed a favor, he could call it in and they would have to oblige.
- v. 10-12 – Paul recognized that justice was eluding him under Festus in spite of his innocence. So, he exercised his right as a Roman citizen by appealing to Caesar. This was just one of many benefits of citizenship. It provided the right to vote and run for public office. As we saw in chapter 22, citizens could not be bound or scourged, or punished with the death penalty for lesser offenses. And they were granted the right to defend themselves in court, including having the supreme authority in the empire, Caesar, hear the case. When he exercised that right, personally he would get legal resolution to this dispute that had extended for a long time. He would also be spared the threat of assassination that had not gone away. The Messianic movement would also have a better chance of legal protection by Rome than if he stayed in Judea and civil unrest continued because of his presence. And his desire to be a witness of The Way in Rome would be realized.

v. 13 – And so Festus granted his request.

25:13-22

But before Paul could be sent to Rome, Herod Agrippa II showed up in Caesarea. He was the last of the Herodian kings, although he was not a true king but what was called a tetrarch who ruled over a small region in the Roman empire and deferred to the authority of Rome. In his case, he ruled over the region of Galilee and Perea (eastern Jordan River Valley). He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great who expanded and adorned the temple in Jerusalem, but also massacred young boys when Yeshua was born. And he was the son of Agrippa 1 who had James, the brother of John killed in Acts 12. Accompanying Agrippa was his sister Bernice, who Josephus said lived with him in an incestuous relationship. So, like his ancestors, Agrippa was a powerful man with corrupted morals.

Festus described to Agrippa what had transpired regarding Paul. In verse 19 Festus referred to “a certain dead man, Yeshua, who Paul asserted to be alive.” That description trivializes the immense significance of who Yeshua is.

Agrippa became intrigued by the story and asked to hear from Paul himself. So that set the stage for yet another trial.

25:23-27

Festus explained to Agrippa that the leaders of Judaism in Jerusalem wanted Paul put to death, but he had not determined that cause existed for such a punishment. At this point, the only potential charges against Paul were religious in nature, and thus were beyond the scope of the authority of Festus. However, since Paul had appealed to Caesar, Festus had no idea what charges should be brought against him in Rome. This presented a major problem for Festus because sending a prisoner under appeal to Caesar would not be justified for something that was insignificant from the perspective of Rome.

So, the intent of Festus was for Agrippa to make that determination. In verse 27 he called the situation absurd. But he went ahead with all of these proceedings because he was primarily concerned about his reputation, not true justice for Paul.