

Lesson 23
Acts 25-26
Innocent but No Hope for Justice

Memory Verse: “the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23 NKJV)

When the new governor, Festus, arrives in Palestine, the Jews are quick to accuse Paul afresh. They no doubt think that the new governor’s lack of experience in handling Jewish affairs will help them win a judgment against Paul (25:1-5). The trial before Festus is much the same as the one before Felix, but the confused Festus is not sure how to handle the case. He sees no reason why Paul should be in prison, yet he thinks it wise to gain the goodwill of the Jews from the outset of his governorship. He therefore suggests that Paul go to Jerusalem and have the case dealt with there, perhaps before the Sanhedrin with Festus himself as the judge (25:6-9).

Paul could tolerate this injustice no longer. Neither Felix nor Festus have found him guilty of any wrongdoing, yet he has been kept a prisoner of Rome for two years; and all this merely to satisfy the Jews. Paul sees clearly that he will receive no justice from either Festus or the Sanhedrin, so he turns to the final court of appeal open to every Roman citizen, that of Caesar himself (25:10-12).

Among those who come to Caesarea to pay their respects to the new governor was Herod Agrippa II. This man is the son of Herod Agrippa I (the governor mentioned in 12:1-4, 20-23) and the brother of Bernice and Drusilla (25:13; cf. 24:24). He is Rome’s appointed ruler over certain areas in the far north of Palestine, but he has no power in the region governed by Festus. He is, however, an expert on Jewish affairs (see 26:3, 27,31), and Festus is quick to seek his advice on Paul’s case (25:14-22).

Festus’ problem is that he has to send Paul to Caesar for trial, but he has no idea what to say to Caesar about the case. He does not know what accusations the Jews have brought against Paul or why they want him executed (25:23-27).

Paul is pleased at last to have the opportunity to put his case before a ruler who has a good knowledge of the Jewish religion (26:1-3). His account of events is similar to that which he gave to the Jewish mob in Jerusalem two years earlier, but with an occasional change of emphasis to suit the present audience. Like most loyal Jews, Paul believes in the resurrection of the dead, but when he preaches that Jesus’ resurrection brought the Jews’ age-long hopes to fulfilment, they persecuted him (26:4-8).

To some extent Paul can understand the Jews’ feelings, because he himself once persecuted the followers of Jesus (26:9-11). But the risen Lord Jesus appeared to him and sent him to preach the forgiveness of sins to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike (26:12-18). Paul willingly obeyed, because he now sees that the salvation brought by Jesus the Messiah is the fulfilment of all that the law and the prophets foretold (26:19-23).

Festus could not follow the argument at all and thinks that Paul is mad (26:24). Agrippa, however, is familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and understands what Paul is saying. Paul therefore appeals to him for support (26:25-

27). Agrippa replied, either light-heartedly or sarcastically, that Paul is being over-enthusiastic if he thinks he could convert him to Christianity in such a short time (26:28-29). Nevertheless, he is honest enough to admit that Paul has done nothing that deserves imprisonment (26:30-32).

These two chapters present Festus in three different situations, each of which related to the apostle Paul.

Scriptural Reading: Acts 26:1-23

Things to learn: Conciliation 2) Consultation 3) Confrontation

Read the introduction to this study and Acts 25-26

Questions:

1) What motivated and resulted in Festus’ conciliation with the Jewish leaders over the 2 year old case of Paul in Acts 25:1-12?

2) Why did Festus consult King Agrippa (Acts 25:13-22) even though he had granted Paul’s appeal to Caesar?

3) Why did Paul make such a long speech in his final defense at the courtroom confrontation with Festus and King Agrippa (Acts 25:23 – 26:32)?