

# Acts 25 Bible Study

## PAUL'S TRIAL BEFORE FESTUS

A. Paul appeals to Caesar to avoid a plot against his life.

1. (Acts 25:1-3) When Felix is replaced, Paul's Jewish accusers decide to re-try the case against Paul.

**Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem; while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.**

a. **Now when Festus had come to the province:** Acts 24 ended with the transition from the governorship of Antonius Felix to that of Porcius **Festus**. Felix was undoubtedly a bad man, but history tells us **Festus** was a basically good man. He governed well, despite all the problems left him by Felix.

i. The statement, "**after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem**" hints at the good and energetic leadership of Festus.

Upon arriving at **Caesarea**, the capital of the Judean province, he

immediately made the trip to **Jerusalem**, probably the most important city of the province.

**b. Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed**

**him against Paul:** Though it had been two years, the case of Paul was still important to the religious leaders. They hoped to make Paul appear before them again in Jerusalem.

i. We can see that Paul's generous imprisonment in Caesarea was actually a providential provision of protective custody against the murderous intentions of the religious leaders. It was also a season of rest and replenishment after his years of hard missionary service, preparing him for the challenges in the years ahead.

**c. That he would summon him to Jerusalem; while they lay in**

**ambush along the road to kill him:** The religious leaders knew that Paul would be acquitted in any fair trial. Therefore, they didn't really want Paul to be put on trial again; they wanted to **ambush** and murder him before the trial could take place.

i. *These were religious men, religious leaders.* Their actions show the danger of religion that is not in true contact with God. If your religion makes you a liar and a murderer, there is something wrong with your religion.

ii. “We see a growth of corruption. In [Acts 23](#), where the plot to murder Paul was first launched, we find that it was the zealots who were responsible. Now, in [Acts 25](#), we find that the leaders are initiating the very thing they were only tangentially involved in earlier.”

## 2. ([Acts 25:4-6a](#)) Festus refuses to put Paul on trial again in Jerusalem.

**But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly. “Therefore,” he said, “let those who have authority among you go down with *me* and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him.” And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea.**

a. **Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea:** We don’t know if Festus knew the intentions of the Jewish leaders or not. Either way, he refused to grant their request for a change of venue, and this was another way that God protected Paul.

b. **Let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him:** Festus was willing to put Paul on trial again, to resolve the matter. Yet he insisted that it would happen in Caesarea, not in Jerusalem.

### 3. (Acts 25:6b-8) Festus re-opens the trial in Caesarea.

**And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought. When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, while he answered for himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.”**

a. **Sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be**

**brought:** Once again Paul was on trial before a Gentile ruler, accused by religious leaders. As before, Paul’s life was in danger should he be found guilty.

b. **Laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could**

**not prove:** As before, the religious leaders made accusations without evidence against Paul. In response, Paul confidently rested on both the evidence and his apparent integrity.

i. Many in the Bible were the target of false accusations (such as Joseph and Daniel). Yet in another sense, *every* follower of Jesus is the target of false accusations by *the accuser of the*

*brethren* (Revelation 12:10). Thankfully, Jesus is our defense against condemnation and false accusation (Romans 8:33-34).

#### 4. (Acts 25:9-12) Paul appeals his case to Caesar.

**But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?” So, Paul said, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.” Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!”**

a. **Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor:** Though he was a good man, Festus also understood that it was important for him to have and keep a good relationship with the Jewish people of his province.

b. **Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?** Festus found it difficult to decide the case. Paul’s standing as a Roman citizen apparently

prevented Festus from *commanding* the trial to be moved to Jerusalem, so he asked Paul about this.

i. It's interesting to wonder if Festus *knew* of the plot to murder Paul or not. If he did know, then he knowingly asked Paul to walk into an ambush and be murdered. If he did not know, then he merely thought that this would please the religious leaders to have the trial in Jerusalem.

c. **So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged...I appeal to Caesar."** Paul saw through the plot against his life. Perhaps it was through supernatural knowledge, or perhaps through God-given common sense and deduction. Therefore, he demanded to stand trial before Caesar.

i. Rightly and wisely, Paul wanted to avoid martyrdom if he could. He wasn't afraid to face the lions, but he didn't want to put his head in a lion's mouth if he could avoid it.

ii. Paul's appeal made sense. He was convinced that the evidence was on his side and that he could win in a fair trial. He also had reason to wonder if his current judge (Festus) was sympathetic to his accusers, the religious leaders among the Jews.

d. **I appeal to Caesar:** It was the right of every Roman citizen to have his case heard by Caesar himself, after initial trials and appeals failed to reach a satisfactory decision. This was in effect an appeal to the supreme court of the Roman Empire.

i. “God, who has appointed courts of law, also gives his people liberty to use them lawfully.”

ii. Paul appealed specifically to Caesar Nero, who was later a notorious enemy of Christians. But the first five years of his reign, under the influence of good men around him, Nero was regarded as a wise and just ruler. Paul had no reason at this time to believe that Nero would be anti-Christian.

## B. Paul’s hearing before King Agrippa.

### 1. (Acts 25:13-14a) Herod Agrippa and Bernice visit Caesarea.

**And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king,**

a. **King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea:** Herod Agrippa II ruled a client kingdom of the Roman Empire to the northeast of Festus’ province. **Agrippa** was known as an expert in Jewish customs

and religious matters. Though he did not have jurisdiction over Paul in this case, his hearing of the matter would be helpful for Festus.

i. Of this **King Agrippa**, his great-grandfather had tried to kill Jesus as a baby; his grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded; his father had martyred the first apostle, James. Now Paul stood before the next in line of the Herods, Herod Agrippa.

ii. **Bernice** was Agrippa's sister. Secular history records rumors that their relationship was incestuous.

iii. Herod Agrippa II didn't rule over much territory, but he was of great influence because the emperor gave him the right to oversee the affairs of the temple in Jerusalem and the appointment of the high priest.

b. **Festus laid Paul's case before the king**: Festus, new to his post and perhaps unfamiliar with Jewish traditions and customs, seemed to be somewhat confused by Paul's case. Therefore, even though there was not enough evidence to convict Paul, his investigation continued.

i. The case was probably confusing to Festus because of the lack of concrete evidence. But, *of course* there wasn't enough evidence to convict Paul of the accusations against him, because he had *done no wrong* ! This was reason enough for acquittal.

ii. This appearance before **King Agrippa** was really a *hearing*, and not a *trial*; Agrippa did not have jurisdiction in the matter. Yet he could have an important influence upon Festus.

**2. (Acts 25:14b-22) Festus explains the case involving Paul to the visiting King Agrippa.**

**Saying: “There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed *me*, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. To them I answered, ‘It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.’ Therefore, when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I**

**commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.” Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” he said, “you shall hear him.”**

a. **Asking for a judgment against him:** The religious leaders hoped that Festus would decide against Paul without ever hearing Paul’s defense.

b. **It is not the custom of the Romans:** Festus appealed to the strong tradition and system of law. He would not condemn Paul without a fair trial.

c. **They brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed:** Festus was surprised, thinking that their accusations against Paul were unimportant. Their accusations focused on matters of their **religion** and **a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.**

i. It is amusing to think of the religious leaders protesting to Festus that Paul won’t stop talking about the risen **Jesus** and hoping that the governor would *make* Paul stop.

ii. The words “**a certain Jesus**” show that Festus didn’t know much about Jesus. It is good to remember that the great and important people of Paul’s day didn’t know much about Jesus, and they had to

be told. “Brethren, this is why we must keep on preaching Jesus Christ, because he is still so little known. The masses of this city are as ignorant of Jesus as Festus was.”

d. **A certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive:**

The limited knowledge Festus *did* have regarding Paul’s preaching shows that in his preaching, Paul emphasized the death and resurrection of Jesus.

i. By implication, it also shows that Paul emphasized *the cross*. It’s hard to believe that Festus knew that Paul preached that Jesus died, without also hearing about *how* Jesus died.

e. **I also would like to hear the man myself:** Agrippa’s curiosity meant that Paul would have another opportunity to speak God’s truth to a Gentile ruler. This would be the third such opportunity for Paul in [Acts 24-26](#) (Felix, Festus, and now Agrippa).

**3. (Acts 25:23) Paul the prisoner is brought before Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus.**

**So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus’ command Paul was brought in.**

a. **When Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp:** This was more than a hearing of evidence; it was an *event*. It was held in an **auditorium**, and all the **commanders and the prominent men of the city** were there. This was another tremendous opportunity for Paul.

b. **At Festus' command Paul was brought in:** Surrounded by the important and powerful people of Caesarea and beyond, Paul came into the auditorium. All the **pomp** and pageantry was meant to communicate who was important, and who wasn't important.

i. Most everyone present — excepting, possibly, the Apostle Paul — was wrong in their estimation of who was important and who was not. Paul had an authority and a dignity greater than any of the important people at this hearing.

ii. “All these very important people would have been greatly surprised, and not a little scandalized, could they have foreseen the relative estimates that later generations would form of them and of the prisoner who now stood before them to state his case.”

#### **4. (Acts 25:24-27) Festus makes an opening statement at the hearing of Paul before Agrippa.**

**And Festus said: “King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore, I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.”**

a. **When I found that he had committed nothing deserving of**

**death:** It was important for Luke to record these words of Festus. They clearly state that Festus understood that Paul was innocent.

b. **So that after the examination has taken place I may have**

**something to write:** Festus wanted to use this trial to prepare an official brief for Paul’s upcoming trial before Caesar.

i. Festus simply could not send Paul to Caesar with a letter that said, “I really don’t know what this man is accused of and he is

probably innocent of any wrongdoing, but I thought I should send him to you anyway.” That was no way to be popular with Caesar.

c. **It seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him:** Paul was so innocent that Festus could not actually describe or **specify** the charges against him.