

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Paul on Trial Before Festus

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Festus Replaces Felix ([25:1-3](#))

Festus had come to the province: As we discussed in Chapter 24, Felix was a bad man and a bad governor, who kept Paul incarcerated for over 2 years. Festus, on the other hand, was reportedly a basically good man who governed well, despite all the problems Felix left for him to clean up, including what to do with Paul!

While they lay in ambush along the road to kill him: Members of the Sanhedrin once again try to avoid a fair trial, wanting Festus to call Paul to Jerusalem instead so that they could ambush and murder him along the way.

Paul's "imprisonment" in Caesarea (which was relatively comfortable, as we noted in Chapter 24) was actually the Holy Spirit's providential provision of protection from the murderous intentions of the Jews. It also serves as a "forced vacation" following a long period of extraordinarily taxing missionary service. That rest would be needed for the great tasks God had planned for the years ahead.

Festus Re-opens the Trial in Caesarea ([25:4-8](#))

Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea: We don't know that Festus actually knew the intentions of the Jewish leaders, but in any case, he refused their request for a change of venue.

The outcome of this trial was the same. The Jews again offered accusations for which they still had no proof, and Paul rested confidently on both the evidence of the case and his integrity.

Paul Appeals His Case to Caesar ([25:9-12](#))

Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem...?: Festus, probably ignorant of the plot of the Jews, suggests moving the trial back to Jerusalem, where Paul would surely be murdered on the journey. Paul, of course, sees through this plot (either through revelation or God-given powers of deduction), and demands to stand trial before Caesar.

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 had failed to reach a satisfactory decision. This was in effect an appeal to the "supreme court" of the Roman Empire.

In this case Paul was appealing specifically to Caesar Nero, who later became an avowed enemy of Christians. But the first five years of his reign, when he was under the influence of good men around him, Nero was regarded as a wise and fair Emperor. So Paul had no reason believe that Nero would be anti-Christian.

One would not make such an appeal capriciously; to do so was to invite the harshest punishment. Paul, though, is absolutely convinced that the evidence is on his side, and he probably also senses that perhaps his new judge Festus want to keep peace with the Jews, and therefore might be sympathetic to Paul's accusers.

Paul's Hearing Before King Agrippa ([25:13-22](#))

Festus laid Paul's case before the king: Festus, being new to this posting, and apparently being unfamiliar with Jewish traditions and customs, seems a bit confused by Paul's case due of the utter lack of concrete evidence against the prisoner. So even though there was not enough evidence to convict Paul, and he could have just acquitted him, out of caution he continues the investigation. He doesn't want one of his first rulings to go the wrong way, after all.

King Agrippa: Herod Agrippa II ruled a client kingdom of the Roman Empire northeast of Festus' province, and was reputed to be an expert in Jewish customs and religious matters. Though he did not have jurisdiction over Paul in this case, Agrippa's review of the case would be helpful for Festus.

Agrippa's great-grandfather was the Herod that had tried to kill Jesus as a baby. His grandfather is the one that had John the Baptist beheaded. His father had martyred the apostle James. So Paul now stands before the next in the long, ugly line of Herods, Herod Agrippa II.

Bernice was Agrippa's sister, and there were rumors that their relationship was incestuous. He didn't rule over a large territory, but he had great influence among the Jews because the emperor gave him the right to oversee the affairs of the temple in Jerusalem, and the responsibility to appoint the high priest.

This appearance before King Agrippa, though, was only a hearing, and not a trial; Agrippa did not have jurisdiction over the case.

Festus's Opening Statement ([25:23-27](#))

When Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp: In that moment, Agrippa and his entourage were treated as elite royalty. They would have been greatly surprised had they been able to foresee the opinions later generations would have of them, especially compared to the opinions of, and world-wide impact of, the "ugly little Jew" (Voltaire) who stood before them.

So that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write: Festus plans to use this hearing and any subsequent trial to prepare an official brief for Paul's upcoming trial before Caesar.