

# ACTS

## Chapter 25

### *Paul Appeals to Caesar*

Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. 2 And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, 3 asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. 4 Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. 5 “So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.” 6 After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. 7 When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. 8 Paul argued in his defense, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.” 9 But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?” 10 But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. 11 If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

**25:1** *Jerusalem to Caesarea.* Sixty miles, a two-day trip. Festus was anxious to go immediately to the center of Jewish rule and worship. (CSB)

**25:2** *chief priests and principal men.* The Sanhedrin. (CSB)

Perhaps elders (cf 24:1), or simply other leading members of the Council. (TLSB)

**25:3** *an ambush.* Probably the same group that had earlier made a vow to take Paul's life (see note on 23:12). (CSB)

**25:6** *tribunal.* To make his decision binding as a formal ruling. (CSB)

Official seat from which a judge made rulings (cf 18:12, 16). The Gk word is also used of God's judgment seat (Rm 14:10; 2Co 5:10). (TLSB)

**25:7** *that they could no prove.* Again, as in the first hearing, Paul's adversaries produced no witnesses or evidence of any kind. (CSB)

Once again, Luke shows that troubles surrounding the preaching of the Gospel are due to groundless provocation by its enemies. (TLSB)

**25:8** *neither... against the law.* Paul had respect for the law (see Ro 7:12; 8:3–4; 1Co 9:20). (CSB)

*against the temple.* Paul had not defied its customs by taking Trophimus into forbidden areas (21:29). Jesus had prophesied its destruction, but he was not responsible for its plight (Lk 21:5–6). (CSB)

*against Caesar.* Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God but not as a political rival of Rome (cf. 17:6–7). He advocated respect for law and order (see Ro 13:1–7) and prayer for civil rulers (see 1Ti 2:2). (CSB)

**25:9** *do you wish to go up to Jerusalem ... ?* Obviously not. Festus had said that the trial would be before him; so Paul insisted that he was then standing in the Roman civil court (v. 10). He wanted to keep his trial there rather than suffer at the hands of a Jewish religious court. As a Roman citizen, he could refuse to go to a local provincial court; instead he looked to a higher Roman court. (CSB)

**25:10** *I am standing before Caesar's tribunal* – Paul was not trying to evade justice, but he would not submit to injustice. For the gospel's sake a preacher of the gospel must not be condemned as a criminal when he is innocent of the charges against him. That would hurt the gospel cause. (PBC)

In a trial, the Roman governor carried the same authority as the emperor himself. (TLSB)

**25:11** *I appeal to Caesar!* Nero had become the emperor by this time. It was the right of every Roman citizen to have his case heard before Caesar himself (or his representative) in Rome. This was the highest court of appeal, and winning such a case could have led to more than just Paul's acquittal. It could have resulted in official recognition of Christianity as distinct from Judaism. (CSB)

Since it appeared that Festus might concede to the Jews and have Paul's trial moved to Jerusalem, Paul requests a change of venue. Every Roman citizen had the right to have his case heard in the emperor's court in Rome. The current emperor, Nero, had not yet become a terrible persecutor of the Church, as he had by AD 68, when Paul and Peter were martyred. (TLSB)

**25:12** *his council.* The officials and legal experts who made up the advisory council for the Roman governor. (CSB)

Group of men who gave advice to the governor, esp regarding legal matters. However, the final decision concerning what to do with Paul rested solely on the governor. (TLSB)

*to Caesar you shall go* – In province of God the hatred of the Jews and the unjust delaying tactics of the two Roman governors combined to permit Paul to preach the gospel in Rome. Two years before, in the barracks of the Antonia Tower, the Lord had told him: "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (23:11). Now it would happen. (PBC)

**25:1–12** The lack of justice in Paul's trial continues under Festus, moving Paul to appeal to Caesar's court in Rome. Governments exist to punish evil and promote good in this life. Support the proper functions of government. But rejoice that ultimate deliverance from evil comes when God declares us "not guilty" for the sake of Christ. • Lord, before Your judgment seat, I deserve to die because of my sins. Thank You that, because Jesus took my punishment, You count me innocent. Amen. (TLSB)

*Paul Before Agrippa and Bernice*

**13 Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. 14 And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, 15 and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. 16 I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. 17 So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. 18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. 19 Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. 20 Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. 21 But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him." 23 So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. 27 For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."**

**25:13** *Agrippa*. Herod Agrippa II. He was 17 years old at the death of his father in A.D. 44 (12:23). Being too young to succeed his father, he was replaced by Roman procurators. Eight years later, however, a gradual extension of territorial authority began. Ultimately he ruled over territory north and northeast of the Sea of Galilee, over several Galilean cities and over some cities in Perea. At the Jewish revolt, when Jerusalem fell, he was on the side of the Romans. He died c. A.D. 100—the last of the Herods. (CSB)

Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I (cf 12:1), ruled a territory that expanded over the years. He had authority over the temple in Jerusalem. (TLSB)

*Bernice*. The oldest daughter of Agrippa I, she was 16 years old at his death. When only 13, she married her uncle, Herod of Chalcis, and had two sons. When Herod died, she lived with her brother, Agrippa II. To silence rumors that she was living in incest with her brother, she married Polemon, king of Cilicia, but left him soon to return to Agrippa. She became the mistress of the emperor Vespasian's son Titus but was later ignored by him. (CSB)

Agrippa's sister; they were involved in an incestuous relationship. (TLSB)

*greeted*.. It was customary for rulers to pay a complimentary visit to a new ruler at the time of his assignment. It was advantageous to each that they get along (cf. Herod Antipas and Pilate, Lk 23:6–12). (CSB)

His father had James put to death with the sword and intended to do the same to Peter (12:1-3). His great uncle was Herod Antipus, who beheaded John the Baptist (Matthew 14:3-12) and tried Jesus (Luke 23:8-12). He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great, who ordered the slaughter of baby boys in and around Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:16). Although he did not rule Judea, he had control over the temple and the right to name the high priest. (PBC)

**25:19** *religion*. Or “superstition,” the same word used by Paul in 17:22. (CSB)

Festus understood the charges against Paul were of a religious nature, nothing that would condemn him before the Roman government. Festus also understood that the controversy revolved around Jesus, specifically whether or not He was alive. (TLSB)

**25:20** *at a loss* – Festus was at a loss in trying to investigate and settle the case against Paul, because under Roman law there was no case against Paul. In his desire to get along with the Jewish leaders he had been willing to conduct a trial in Jerusalem. He had not acted responsibly, and his prisoner finally took the responsibility away from him by appealing to Caesar. (PBC)

**25:22** *I would like to hear*. Agrippa had been wishing to hear Paul (cf. Antipas wanting to see Jesus, Lk 9:9; 23:8). (CSB)

**25:23** *great pomp*. Probably Agrippa and Bernice, as well as all the other officials present, were dressed in their finest. (TLSB)

*audience hall*. Not the judgment hall, for this was not a court trial. It was in an auditorium appropriate for the pomp of the occasion, with a king, his sister, the Roman governor and the outstanding leaders of both the Jews and the Roman government present. (CSB)

Probably in the palace of Herod, where trials were heard. (TLSB)

*military tribunes*. Five regiments were stationed at Caesarea, so their five commanders would be in attendance. (CSB)

There were five cohorts in Caesarea. (TLSB)

*Agrippa...military tribunes...prominent men* – Jesus had predicted just such occasions as this for his disciples: “You will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict (Luke 21:12-15). (PBC)

Most likely Gentiles who were well respected and viewed as leaders. (TLSB)

**25:26** *I have nothing definite*. Festus was required to send Caesar an explicit report on the case when an appeal was made. He hoped for some help from Agrippa in this matter. This was not an official trial but a special hearing to satisfy the curiosity of Agrippa and provide an assessment for Festus. (CSB)

Whoever presented a case to the emperor had to do so in writing. Festus wanted to appear competent to the emperor, not simply to repeat the religious charges of the Jewish leaders (v 19). (TLSB)

*especially before you, King Agrippa.* He would be sensitive to differences between Pharisees and Sadducees, expectations of the Messiah, differences between Jews and Christians, and Jewish customs pertinent to these problems. (CSB)

**25:27** *charges.* Cf v 26. (TLSB)

**25:13–27** Festus brings Paul's case before King Agrippa and Bernice so they may formulate charges to send with Paul to Rome. Festus fails to set Paul free, even though he knows Paul is innocent. We sin in a similar way when we hold a grudge against someone. Repent of all grudges. Jesus, who was innocent of all charges against Him, took the punishment we deserve for all the times we hold grudges. • Christ Jesus, thank You for Your willingness to be charged unjustly and for taking our punishment! Because of You, we no longer have any charges against us in the heavenly Father's court. Amen. (TLSB)