

Thoughts on Acts Twenty-Five

The new governor of Judea, Porcius Festus, arrived in the province to replace Felix and went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea three days later. After Paul had been in prison for two years, Ishmael replaced Ananias as the high priest, and a new group of leaders greeted Festus to bring up the old charges against Paul. This shows the hatred they carried for Paul and the extent to which they would go to carry out their original plans. They knew there was no charge they could bring against Paul that would result in a Roman sentence of execution, so asked for Paul to be brought back to Jerusalem, planning to attack and kill him on the way Acts (25:1-3).

Their request to return Paul to Jerusalem was offered to accomplish two things. First, they wanted to learn if their influence could sway Festus' decisions. Second, they wanted Paul in their territory to overpower his guards and kill him. The language of the request, *"a concession against Paul"* (Acts 25:3), indicates a concession for the Jews and the plot against Paul. The Jews presented many and various accusations against Paul that Festus found troubling but did not need critical action and did not require that his plans be changed. *"Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly"* (Acts 25:4). Nero (54–68 CE) had probably warned Festus about the Jews leaders and although his initial reaction was to reject their requests, he would later reconsider the move to Jerusalem.

Since Festus held Paul in Caesarea and his judgment seat was there, he determined that he would allow the Jews to send their "influential" men to present their case. So it was that nearly two weeks later, Paul stood before his accusers as they presented conflicting charges in the manner of a mob, unlike the smooth oratory of Tertullus before Felix two years earlier. Historians recorded that Festus was a fair and logical ruler. He recognized two things about the "evidence" presented. One, there was no proof offered for any of it. Second, all the disturbance was about Jewish law, and there was no crime against Rome. Paul summarized his defense: *"I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar"* (Acts 25:8).

There is significance in where the judgment seat is located. Roman law was judged where Rome's standard was established. Israel's law and Temple law were considered where the Tora in the Ark of Testimony was located. Likewise, we will face the judgment seat for Christ's law is in Heaven. Festus saw that the Jews were concerned that Paul had broken Temple law and that the judgment seat was in Jerusalem. Wishing to remain friendly with the Jews, Festus asked Paul, *"Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?"* (Acts 25:8-9). However, as Claudius Lysias realized as he protected Paul in Jerusalem, Paul was entitled to Rome's protection as a citizen of Rome. Standing before Festus, Paul was before Rome's tribunal for judgment. Since that tribunal was willing to try him in another's court, Paul appealed to his ultimate Roman authority, Caesar. Festus answered, *"You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go"* (Acts 25:12).

Before Paul could be sent to Rome, Agrippa and Bernice visited Festus on a diplomatic visit. This was Herod Agrippa II, son of the first Herod Agrippa and the brother of Berenice, Mariamne, and Drusilla (Drusilla being the second wife of Antonius Felix). Because Agrippa was schooled in both Roman and Israel's laws, Felix brought Paul into their discussions, hoping Agrippa could help him compose a letter explaining why he sent Paul to Nero. Felix briefed Agrippa that the conflict was on points of the Jew's law and one Jesus whom Paul believed to be alive. With all this outside his knowledge and concern, Felix needed help writing the dispatch orders.

Agrippa was eager to hear Paul and said to Festus, *"I also would like to hear the man myself"* (Acts 25:22). Years earlier, Jesus had told Ananias, *"he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel"* (Acts 9:15). Now Paul would present the truth of the resurrected Christ before a king and the assembled dignitaries forming the court of the king and the Roman governor. Festus introduced Paul to those who did not know him. The main concern was *"all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer"* (Acts 25:24). Festus also explained his problem. *"I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write"* (Acts 25:27).

Considering Paul's commission from Christ to preach to kings, what would you write to Nero?