

PAUL'S CASE REVISITED

Acts 25-26 / August 59 A.D.

From June 57 A.D. to July 59 A.D. the Apostle Paul remained under guard in Caesarea in the palace of Herod the Great. Finally, in July 59 A.D. it began to look like Paul's case would be revisited.

(Acts 24:27) Felix was out, Festus was in. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us Festus was an honorable man: a vast improvement over Felix. Festus wasted no time traveling to Jerusalem to introduce himself to the Jewish high priest and to members of the Sanhedrin with whom he will need to work closely in ruling over Judea.

Acts 25:1-12 Paul Forced to Appeal to Caesar

The Jews tried to play Festus, but whether he realized it or not, Festus thwarted their scheme to murder Paul. When Festus returned to Caesarea, he gave Paul a hearing.

The possibility of being tried in Jerusalem put Paul in an untenable position. If that decision was made, Paul knew he might never make it to Jerusalem alive and if he did, he would never receive a fair trial. Therefore, he used the only option left him and that was, as a Roman citizen, to invoke his right to have his case heard by Caesar.

But Festus had a problem; he didn't know what to tell Caesar about the prisoner Paul. Festus sought advice from a friend who happened along at this time.

Acts 25:13-27 Festus Seeks King Agrippa II's Advice

Agrippa the King was Agrippa II, a descendant of Herod the Great. King Agrippa II ruled several territories one of which was Galilee. Bernice was King Agrippa II's sister. Both Agrippa II and Bernice had a Jewish background

Festus was at a loss as to what to write Caesar about Paul so he appeals to Agrippa, Bernice and the other dignitaries in the room to help him!

Acts 26:1-23 Paul Testifies Before King Agrippa and Bernice

Acts 26:24-32 Paul Appealed to King Agrippa to Believe

Festus couldn't handle it. He interrupted Paul with a shout. Festus had already complained earlier to Agrippa that he had no intellectual grasp of this business **about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive** (25:19). Now to have this whole story surface again was too much for a thinking Roman. He didn't doubt Paul's intellectual capacity, but any sensible person in the Greco-Roman world knew that people do not rise from the dead. Paul's claim simply showed what can happen to a person who spends too much time studying the Old Testament scrolls.

In this informal hearing no one could render an official verdict. Bernice and Agrippa agreed with what Festus had already decided: Paul had broken no Roman laws, nor any Jewish laws worthy of death or even imprisonment. Had he not appealed to Caesar, he could have been set free.

Acts was an *Amicus Brief* intended by Luke to be presented to Caesar on Paul's behalf. In this section Luke presents two more Roman officials who concluded Paul was innocent of any wrongdoing against Rome or Judaism.

What is striking is the centrality of the resurrection. In his opening statement, Paul refers to the resurrection as **the promise made by God to our fathers** (26:6). At the heart of Jewish theology is the hope of the resurrection. Then, in his conclusion, Paul asserted that the entire message of the Hebrew Scriptures (bracketed by Moses' writings and the prophets) is **that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles** (26:23).

In our presentation of the Gospel, we tend to emphasize the substitutionary atonement, that is, Jesus died in our place on the cross. But if, as Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus did not rise from the dead then His death on the cross is worthless; He was just another sinner suffering the consequences of His sin. But the historical fact is that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the grave on Sunday, April 5th, 33 A.D. He lived with His disciples and the people of Capernaum over a period of 40 days and on one occasion during that time was seen by over 500 men. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth proves God the Father accepted Jesus' payment for our sin. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is the guarantee that all who rely upon Jesus for forgiveness will rise from the dead to eternal life with God.

The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is the basis for our future service in His Kingdom (Revelation 20:6).

In this life, it is the promise of the resurrection that can set us free from the fear of death to serve Jesus wholeheartedly (Philippians 1:20-23).

It is the resurrection that should motivate us to live for Jesus each and every day knowing we are going to give to Him an account for the way we lived our Christian life (2 Corinthians 5:1-10).

All praise and glory be to our Lord and Savior Jesus of Nazareth the Risen One!

Voice of the Martyrs Needs for January: heavy duty, light colored tarps (minimum size: 8' x 10') or donations for tarps. Bandaids.