

Week 40

Paul's Evangelistic Defense: Part 1

Paul's Hearing and Defense Before Festus and King Agrippa

In Acts chapter 25, Luke narrates the events that took place after Festus, the new Roman governor, arrived in Judea and replaced Felix, who had left Paul in prison for two years. Felix had hoped all along to get some form of bribery or to profit off of Paul during his time of imprisonment, and in exchange, Paul would be set free.

Though it would seem Paul would have been forgotten after two years in jail, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem still wanted to kill Paul. They asked Festus to bring him to Jerusalem for trial, hoping to ambush him on the way. Festus refused and invited them to come to Caesarea, where he was holding Paul. After hearing the accusations of the Jews and the defense of Paul, Festus realized that Paul had not done anything worthy of death or imprisonment, but, like Felix before him, he also wanted to please the Jews. Roman governors were always afraid of a militant uprising among the Jews.

Festus asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem and be judged by him there. Paul, knowing that he would not get a fair trial in Jerusalem, once again appealed to Caesar, as a Roman citizen. Festus agreed and decided to send him to Rome. However, before sending Paul to Caesar, Festus wanted to consult with King Agrippa, who had come to Caesarea with his sister Bernice to greet him.

Some introduction is needed for us to understand Agrippa and Bernice. They were actually brother and sister. Some historians have alluded to an incestuous relationship between them, though there is no conclusive proof of that. As the children of Herod Agrippa I, who had killed James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12), they were also descendants of Herod the Great, who had tried to kill Jesus as a baby (Matthew 2). Herod the Great was installed by the Romans as the first "Client" king of the territory of Israel, after the defeat of the Hasmonean Dynasty in 63 BC. The Hasmoneans were in fact Jews, though not in any way in the Davidic line of succession, and their story can be read about in the book of the Maccabees, which is included in both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Old Testament scriptures.

Agrippa, and all of his ancestors before him, were not Jews but were Edomites. The Edomite kingdom dates all the way back to Esau who sold his birthright to his younger twin brother Jacob, as told in the Book of Genesis. However, in time, Jewish kings forced the Edomite people to convert to Judaism. Agrippa, though not a practicing or religious Jew, was himself very familiar with the Jewish faith. He was the king of some territories in northern Palestine, and he had authority over the Jewish temple and priesthood. Festus could not find any real crime of which Paul had committed that would merit sending him to be tried before Caesar, so he told Agrippa about Paul's case and asked for his opinion, knowing of his knowledge of Jewish customs. Agrippa expressed his curiosity to hear Paul himself, and Festus arranged a hearing for the next day.

D. PAUL IN JERUSALEM (21:15-23:22)

1. Welcomed by Brethren (21:15-26)
2. Arrested by the Jews (21:27-40)
3. Paul's Defense (22:1-21)
4. The Response of the People (22:22-29)
5. Paul Before the Sanhedrin (23:1-10)

- 6. The Plot Against Paul (23:11-22)
- 7. Paul is transferred to Caesarea (23:23-35)

E. PAUL IN CAESAREA (23:23-26:32)

- 1. Paul Escorted to Caesarea (23:23-35)
- 2. Paul Before Felix (24:1-21)
- 3. Paul Imprisoned (24:22-27)
- 4. Paul Before Festus (25)
- 5. Paul Before Agrippa (26)

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Study Notes – Week 40
