

Paul Escapes Once More from the Sanhedrin

V 1-3 Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him,

asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem – while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.

“He went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.” Festus was acquainting himself with the situation in his new “*province*”, especially through interacting with the “*high priest and the chief men of the Jews*” who, of course, lost no time in informing him “*against Paul*”.

“Lay in ambush along the road to kill him.” The Sanhedrin were again trying to get Paul into their territory so they could find the opportunity to kill him. This time they were not just accomplices to the criminal acts of a rogue bunch of Jews (as in Acts 23:14-15) but were themselves the plotters. It is difficult to fathom how this ruling body, who claimed to be God’s representatives to the Jewish people, could fall into such depths of maliciousness. Their criminal behavior can perhaps be explained as the sad end result of allowing pride, envy, and bitterness to build up, coupled with a stubborn refusal to yield to the truth and will of God.

We can understand why Jesus said to them, “*You also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness* [iniquity-KJV]. . . *Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*” (Matthew 23:28,33) It should be remembered, however, that this group was a very small bunch (albeit very influential), but they were not representative of all the Jewish people, many of whom had become dedicated Christians and, like Paul, were committed to changing the world of their day with the Good News of the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

V 4 But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly.

“Paul should be kept at Caesarea.” As the headquarters of Roman government in Judea, Caesarea was the proper place for Paul, a Roman

citizen, to be tried. To his credit Festus did not at this point allow himself to be unduly influenced by the Jewish “lobby” in Jerusalem.

V 5-6 “Therefore,” he said, “let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him.”

And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.

“*Sitting on the judgment seat.*” This signified the hearing was an official Roman trial.

V 7-8 When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove,

while he answered for himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.”

“*Many serious complaints. . . which they could not prove.*” This should have been the end of the matter.

V 9 But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?”

“*Wanting to do the Jews (the Sanhedrin rulers) a favor.*” Festus had just spent “ten days” in Jerusalem with “*the high priest and the chief men of the Jews*” (verse 1,6), who no doubt used the time to get him somewhat under their influence. Perhaps the Jews were hoping to take advantage of the newcomer from Rome, hoping to get him to commit to some compromise with them before being fully informed about their murderous intentions.

The previous governor Felix also had tried to “*do the Jews a favor*” through the decision to continue Paul’s imprisonment. (24:27) Likewise Herod Agrippa I, 15 or so years before, after executing the apostle James, “*saw that it pleased the Jews*”. (Acts 12:3) And now Festus, “*wanting to do the Jews a favor,*” was about to go down the same road.

This compromise, “*to go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged*”, would play directly into the Jews’ hands, giving them the opportunity to murder Paul somewhere on their own territory, away from the well guarded city of Roman Caesarea.

V 10-11 So Paul said, “**I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know.**

“**For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.**”

“*I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat.*” Paul wisely rejects Festus’ compromise, reminding the governor that he, as a Roman citizen, had every right to be tried before Caesar.

“*I do not object to dying.*” The implication here is that going to Jerusalem would mean certain death, but since he had not “*committed anything worthy of death*”, therefore, he should not be sent to Jerusalem.

V 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, “**You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!**”

“*Conferred with the council.*” Festus’ advisers. “*To Caesar you shall go.*” To send Paul to the Jews would offend Roman law; to try Paul and acquit him would make Festus unpopular with the Jews. So Festus was no doubt happy to grant Paul’s appeal, for then he could wash his hands of the whole affair; the case would be transferred out of his court to the emperor’s. No doubt, Paul was elated to receive this verdict. It not only gave him protection against his enemies, but most important, this was his “ticket” to Rome, the place he had been wanting for several years to visit.

V 13 And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.

“*King Agrippa.*” Herod Agrippa II was well versed in Jewish affairs. He was the son of Herod Agrippa I, who killed James and had Peter imprisoned. His great-uncle was Herod Antipas of the Gospels during

Jesus' ministry while his great-grandfather, Herod the Great, ruled at the time Jesus was born. The Herodians were Edomites, descendants of Esau, and were used by the Romans to rule as puppet kings over the Jews. Herod Agrippa II, the last of the Herodians, ruled the territory northeast of Festus' jurisdiction of Judah and Samaria. (See map.) Incidentally, the Romans made sure to keep shifting the Herods' jurisdiction from place to place; this kept the dynasty weak, preventing them from building up a solid power base in Israel.

"Bernice." Agrippa's sister and consort. Their incestuous relationship was the talk of Rome where Agrippa had grown up. Bernice for a while became the Emperor Vespasian's mistress, then his son Titus's, but she always returned to her brother Agrippa. So she certainly got around and probably wielded some considerable behind-the-scenes influence among the elite ruling circles of that time. She and Agrippa also had as their sister Drusilla who was married to the former governor Felix.



V 14-21 When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix,

"about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him.

"To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.'

"Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in.

"When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed,

"but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

"And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters.

"But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar."

"It is not the custom of the Romans." Many aspects of the Roman judicial system are still in use today, and their principle of allowing an accused person a fair trial - to meet "*the accusers face to face*" and have "*opportunity to answer for himself*" - proved its worth. In this case, the fair trial allowed Paul the opportunity to prove his innocence and thus save himself from certain death at the hands of his religious enemies.

"Festus laid Paul's cause before the king." Festus reiterated the events of the last few days concerning Paul to his visitor King Agrippa.

"Their own religion." Festus noted that the Jews had "*brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed*". He was expecting to hear that Paul would be accused of murder, sedition, and other such traitorous deeds. But instead, they accused him of "*some questions. . . about their own religion*". Any charges to do with religion did not belong in a Roman court.

"I was uncertain of such questions." As a newcomer to the area, and having a different religious background, Festus could not comprehend this

controversy between Christians and Jews.

“Augustus.” Means “revered” or “worshiped one” and was another title, in addition to “Caesar”, that was bestowed on the emperor, who at that time was the infamous Nero.

V 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” he said, “you shall hear him.”

“I also would like to hear the man myself.” This implies that Agrippa had been wanting to do so for some time. (God prepares people’s hearts.) Being “expert in all customs and questions” of the Jews (26:3), he had more than a passing interest in finding out firsthand what Paul, Christianity’s leading spokesperson, had to say about this radical new movement that had swept through their land in those days.

V 23 So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus’ command Paul was brought in.

“With great pomp. . . with the commanders, and prominent men of the city.” This was an elite gathering of the rulers and influential people of that region, an unusual set-up and opportunity for Paul to reach this upper level of society. These people were present, not so much to sit in judgment of Paul, but they were curious to see what it was about this man who had aroused such controversy among the Jews. Of course, the outcome of the hearing would have some bearing on how Festus might word his report to Caesar, but other than that Paul was free to speak as he pleased to this select group of people.

V 24-27 And Festus said: “King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer.

“But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him.

“I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to

write.

“For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.”

“Crying out that he was not fit to live any longer.” From this we get an idea of how intense was the opposition against Paul and the new Christian movement, an attack which was coming from **“the whole assembly of the Jews”**.

“I have nothing certain to write to my lord [Caesar].” Since Festus did not understand the nature of the charges against Paul, he didn’t know what to write in his official report to Nero. This would have been foolish, even dangerous, to send a prisoner to Caesar without a set of clear charges against that prisoner. **“Especially before you, King Agrippa.”** Festus hoped that King Agrippa’s knowledge of Jewish affairs could help him to make sense of the charges against Paul.

(Continue to ACTS, chapter 26)