

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 6j: Acts 25:1 – 26:32 – Paul’s Captivity – Part 2

Introduction

Over the past few chapters, we have seen Paul go from being a traveling missionary to a prisoner trapped in Felix’s prison for two years. This was a big transition for Paul and likely was a great trial for him as his heart longed to preach the gospel throughout the world, especially in Rome. In this lesson we will see Paul use another opportunity to witness for the Lord. The Lord will in turn bless the desire of Paul’s heart and allow him to begin his journey to Rome.

Acts 25:1-12 – Paul before Festus

We learned at the end of Acts 24 that Festus succeeded Felix as governor of Judea. Unlike Felix, who was a former slave, Festus came from a line of Roman nobility and was generally thought to be a better ruler than Felix. Along with the throne, Festus also inherited Felix’s problems, one of which was Paul. Felix never resolved his imprisonment and had kept him jailed in the hopes of getting some monetary gain from the Christians. In contrast to Felix, Festus was a man of action and he held Paul’s trial within two weeks of taking office.

Why did the Jews try to persuade Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem?

They wanted to attempt to murder Paul on his way down to Jerusalem.

What was Festus’ solution?

Festus’ solution was to have the Jews come to Caesarea and prosecute Paul before the judgment seat (tribunal).

What was the Jews’ weakness in their case against Paul?

They made many charges but had no evidence against him.

What did Festus propose to do and why?

Festus wanted to make the Jewish leaders happy, so he asked Paul to consider going to Jerusalem and standing trial there. By appeasing the Jewish leaders, they might return the favor by encouraging the Jews to be submissive to Festus’ edicts.

What was Paul’s response? Was this a good move on his part?

Paul’s response was to appeal to Caesar. Caesar sat over the high court of Rome and would hear those cases unable to be resolved by local officials, such as Festus. Paul knew the Jews wanted to ambush him on the way up to Caesarea two years earlier and that they might try to do it again if he traveled back. By appealing to Caesar, he ensured himself safe passage to Rome and the opportunity to settle his case once and for all.

Acts 25:13-22 – Paul gains an audience with King Agrippa

King Agrippa was the last in the long line of Herods to rule in Northern Palestine. He was actually King Agrippa II, named after his father, the previous Herod. His father, Agrippa I, was the Herod who killed James, arrested Peter, and made the great speech, after which he died because he did not give God the glory. His great-uncle, Herod Antipas, killed John the Baptist, sought Jesus’ life, and later tried Him. His great-grandfather was Herod the Great, who sought the baby Jesus and ended up killing the male babies in Bethlehem in an effort to murder Jesus.

Bernice was not only King Agrippa’s significant other, but also his sister. Drusilla, Felix’s wife, was their sister. Bernice often left Agrippa to have affairs with other men, but she seemed to keep coming back to him. Agrippa was very familiar with the affairs of Jews and was in charge of the temple treasury and had the ability to appoint the high priest.

How did Festus relate the Jews’ disagreement with Paul?

He said that they disagreed over matters of religion and over a certain dead man, name Jesus, who Paul preached to be alive. Festus did not have a good understanding of Jewish law or Christianity.

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What was Festus’ dilemma and why did he ask Agrippa for help?

Festus couldn’t send Paul to Caesar without a report describing the charges. He didn’t know what to write because he didn’t really understand the issues. Agrippa was an expert in such matters and would be able to shed some light on the situation.

Acts 25:23-26:32 – Paul before King Agrippa

Why was Paul happy about his opportunity to plead his case before Agrippa?

I believe there are two reasons he was happy. First, he had another opportunity to share the gospel. Secondly, he knew Agrippa had an understanding of Jewish law and customs and would be an intelligent listener to his pleas.

Why did Paul say he was standing trial?

Paul said he was standing trial because he believed the promises of Scripture about a Messiah and His resurrection from the dead. Specifically, Paul believed that those prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. By His resurrection, He is the first fruits from the dead and thereby seals our pending resurrection at His return.

What were Paul’s specific tactics for persecuting Christians?

1. He committed many of them to prison.
2. He cast his vote in trials to have them executed.
3. He tried to force them to blaspheme (renounce their faith in Christ).
4. He chased after them as they scattered to different cities.

As Paul recounts his conversion on the road to Damascus, he said that the Lord told him, “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” What does this mean?

Jesus was convicting Paul through the Spirit. The word, “prick” means “goad”. A goad was a sharp stick used to drive an oxen. It was bad enough to have the goad prod the oxen along, but when he kicked against it, the wound was made even more severe. God was telling Paul that by resisting Him, Paul was making it even harder on himself than it needed to be. Oftentimes, our struggles with God are made harder by our unwillingness to yield to Him and follow His lead.

To what purpose had the Lord called Paul?

Paul was called to be a witness to what the Lord had just revealed to Him (His resurrection and reign) as well as the other things the Lord would reveal to him in the future. Paul was to reach out to both Jew and Gentile with the message of salvation.

How did Paul explain his continued preaching of Christ? Why did he do it?

He was simply being obedient to the heavenly vision that he received of God. God told him to do it, so he was going to do it.

What did Paul mean when he said that he preached, “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”? (see also Luke 3:8-14 and 1 Peter 1:14-16)

Paul preached repentance and faith towards Christ for salvation. He also preached that people needed to live righteously in a manner consistent with the salvation that was imparted to them. One who has truly repented has a changed life. A good tree brings forth good fruit. Paul didn’t have any room for empty professions without changed lives.

Did Paul narrow his ministry to a certain type of people?

No, Paul said he would preach to both great and small. Like God, he was not a respecter of persons. He preached to kings, governors, lawyers, merchants, prison guards and prisoners.

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What was Festus’ accusation against Paul? (See 1 Corinthians 1:23)

That all of his education and learning drove him crazy. Festus wasn’t from Judea and had not witnessed the ministry of Christ or his crucifixion. Neither was he familiar with the rapid growth of the church and the many miracles done by God. The idea of one being raised from the dead sounded crazy to him.

Why was Paul persuaded that Agrippa knew what he was talking about and believed him?

All the things Paul preached of were not hidden facts. They had been attested by God Himself through many miracles of which Agrippa had no doubt heard. Agrippa knew the Jewish priests (having appointed the high priest) and what their motivations were. He could tell that Paul believed what he was preaching.

What was Agrippa’s response to Paul and how did Paul respond to Agrippa?

Agrippa confessed that Paul made a very convincing argument and that he was almost persuaded to place his faith in Christ. Paul’s response was that he desired that everyone in the room had what he had (a relationship with Christ), except for being imprisoned.

What was Agrippa’s verdict?

Paul was not guilty of any crime, but he had to go to Caesar since he had already appealed his case.

Was it good or bad that Paul had appealed to Caesar?

It was a good thing. It saved him from being murdered on the way to Jerusalem. It ensured him free and guarded passage to Rome. It also gave him the audience of Caesar to present his case and his testimony.

Assignment:

Read Acts 27:1 – 28:31 in preparation for the next lesson