

Acts of the Apostles

Week 31: Acts 25:1-22

Paul's Trial Before Festus (25:1-12)

- Sometime between AD 58 and 60, Porcius Festus succeeded Felix as the procurator of Judea (v 1).
 - o Festus belonged to a clan of Roman senators.
 - o Josephus spoke highly of him as one who was a competent administrator who attempted to help rid the area of bandits and troublemakers.
 - o He died in office in AD 62.
- Shortly after arriving in Caesarea, he made a trip to Jerusalem to meet with Jewish leadership (v 1).
 - o This meeting probably covered a myriad of issues and was an initial attempt by Festus to curry some favor with Jewish leadership.
 - o The leaders saw this change in leadership as an opportunity to revive their plan to kill Paul.
 - o They asked Festus to transfer Paul to Jerusalem with the intent of ambushing Paul on the way (v3).
- Festus defers a decision on Paul and invites the leaders to come to Caesarea to make their case against Paul.
 - o Festus had good reasons to acquiesce to Jewish leadership in Paul's case. It would help him clear a backlog of cases that Felix had left unresolved. It would also put the leaders in debt to him.
 - o His unwillingness to sacrifice Paul to them reveals at a minimum a respect for the rule of law.
- The trial in Caesarea repeats the pattern of previous trials.
 - o The leaders make serious but unprovable charges against Paul (v 7).
 - o Paul asserts his innocence. He has done nothing wrong against the Jewish law, the Temple, or Caesar (v 8).
- Festus concludes that this is a religious matter (see 25:19-20).
 - o He is glad to send this case to the Sanhedrin to be tried for the reasons stated above.
 - o Despite the personal advantages of having Paul tried in Jerusalem, Festus continues to follow the rule of law by asking Paul if he would be willing to be tried in Jerusalem.
- Paul easily recognizes that going to Jerusalem would be suicide.
 - o He argues that as a Roman citizen, he cannot be handed over to the Jews without being found guilty in a Roman court (vv 11-12).
 - o Paul is not afraid to die (v 11), but he does not want to die unnecessarily.
 - o He appeals his case to Caesar (v 12).
- Festus knows he must tread carefully with a Roman citizen and grants Paul's appeal (v 12).
 - o In some ways, Paul's appeal gives Festus a convenient out.
 - o Had Festus turned Paul over to the Jewish leaders, he would have been complicit in a Roman citizen's death.

- Had Festus released Paul he would have earned the ire of Jewish leaders he was trying to appease.
- With Paul's appeal, Festus can pass Paul's case up the chain of command.

Festus Consults King Agrippa (25:13-22)

- Shortly thereafter, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice show up to pay their respects to the new proconsul (v 13).
 - Marcus Julius Agrippa II was son of Herod Agrippa I who had persecuted the church at the beginning of Acts (see 12:1-23).
 - He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great (see Matthew 2:16).
 - He was the brother of Felix's wife, Drusilla.
 - Bernice had been married to their uncle, and it was rumored that she and Agrippa II had an incestuous relationship.
- Festus discusses Paul's case with Agrippa.
 - He notes the basics of the case indicating that he feels it is mainly a religious dispute.
 - The word translated "religion" (v 19) has a negative connotation and is akin to superstition revealing Festus's disdain of the Jewish faith.
 - Still, he gets to the heart of the matter, the argument is about a man name Jesus who died, but Paul claims has risen from the grave (v 19).
- Festus notes that he was "at a loss how to investigate such matters" (v 20).
 - Festus serves as a reminder that for some people, issues of faith are almost inconceivable.
 - Festus has no desire to determine whether or not what Paul proclaims is true or false.
- When Agrippa asks to hear from Paul, Festus quickly agrees. Perhaps Agrippa will help him formulate a good reason for sending Paul on to Rome.
 - While Festus can say, this citizen appealed to Caesar, Caesar may still feel like this is a waste of his time.
 - The interplay between Festus and Agrippa is reminiscent of Pilate seeking help from Herod Antipas with Jesus (see Luke 23:6-12).

Sources

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