

Introduction

Falsely accused of being a part of breaking Grandma's ceiling lamp shade—no matter how much I pleaded my case, I wasn't going to get a fair trial

1. This is now Paul's second Roman trial before a second Roman governor:
 - a. The first governor was Felix:
 - 1) If you remember from last week, Felix was a tyrannical leader—Roman historian Tacitus referred to him as having “the power of a king but the mind of a slave” (not very flattering)
 - 2) According to Josephus, his harsh actions led to ever increasing tension between the Jews and Rome which ultimately led to three major Jewish rebellions
 - 3) He was also corrupt: he refused to rule on Paul's case, but instead left him in prison for over two years hoping to get a bribe from Paul, and then leaving him there as a favor to the Jews when he left office
 - 4) He was ultimately removed from office, tried, and convicted for his corruption and disregard for the law, being spared the death penalty only because of the favor his brother held with the emperor
 - b. The second governor is Festus:
 - 1) His governorship was short-lived; He died in office after serving only two years
 - 2) Historically, we don't know much about Festus, but he was considered a good and fair governor
 - 3) He was known for acting quickly (something we see reflected in our text today), and for putting down two small Jewish uprisings
 - 4) He did share one trait with Felix, however, and that was a desire to placate or garner favor with the Jews, and as we will see today this impacted his ability to provide Paul with a fair trial
2. Justice is supposed to be blind:
 - a. Often times, statues of Lady Justice (the Roman god of justice) are portrayed with blindfolds signifying that justice is supposed to be blind—it's supposed to be objective and impartial
 - b. However, justice isn't always because there are often two sides to the law:
 - 1) One is the legal side—this refers to the rules, regulations, laws, and penalties; the black and white or concrete aspects of the law if-you-will
 - 2) The other side is the social side—this refers to how the laws and penalties applied based on things like bias, prejudice, politics, social influences, etc.:
 - a) Example: the wealthy or affluent getting preferential treatment
 - b) Example: Black Lives Matter riots vs. Freedom Convoy in Canada
 - c. Unfortunately, the social side is often the most powerful and leads to injustice within the legal system
 - d. We are going to see an element of that today which leads to Paul appealing his case to the highest official in the Rome, the emperor himself

A. Festus travels to Jerusalem to meet with the chief priests and influential Jewish leaders (Acts 25:1-5)

1. When governor Festus's predecessor, Felix, was removed from office he left Paul in prison **"wishing to do the Jews a favor"** (24:27):
 - a. In other words, it was a bit of a peace offering to appease the Jews and keep the peace
 - b. He may have also thought it would bode well in his favor as he faced trial by Rome for increasing Jewish/Roman tensions through his harsh treatment of Jews)
2. The fact that Paul was still in prison is important because just three days into his term as governor over Judea, Festus travels to Jerusalem (READ 25:1-3):
 - a. There is an important word in the Greek text that's translated as either **"now"**, **"then"**, or **"therefore"** by most English Bibles
 - 1) It's a conjunction that indicates that something follows what precedes it
 - 2) Here it indicates that Festus's trip to Jerusalem was directly related to Paul still being in prison when he took over as governor
 - 3) Remember earlier when I said Festus was known for acting quickly? We see that here
 - b. So, Festus's first order of business is to travel to Jerusalem and meet with **"the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews"**:
 - 1) The chief priests were the Jewish legal authorities, while **"leading men"** is a reference to the most prominent (as the NET) or influential men in Jewish society; they were the ones with the social and political clout
 - 2) These men laid out their charges against Paul and then repeatedly (imperfect) begged him for a **"concession (lit. a favor) against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem"**, presumably so they could try him themselves
 - 3) Luke also reveals to us that at the same time they were doing this, they were planning yet another plot to assassinate Paul
 - c. Fortunately, Festus refuses their request and instead invites a select group to accompany him back to Caesarea and where he will hold a tribunal (READ 25:4-5):
 - 1) It's unclear why Festus refused their request, but what's interesting is that when he informs them that Paul was being kept in Caesarea and that he was heading back there soon, he only invites the **"influential men among you"** to accompany him back to Caesarea
 - 2) When the Jews came down to present their case before the prior governor, Felix, it included the chief priests, the elders, and a lawyer (but no witnesses)
 - 3) But here, Festus only invites the elite among the Jews—those with the most social or political power and influence
 - 4) This provides our first clue that Paul might not get a fair trial:
 - a) Remember my comments about the social side of the law sometimes being the most influential side? This is an example
 - b) Later in our passage, we learn that Festus was looking for a way to appease the Jews, much like Felix before him
 - c) We have to remember that at this time, there was a lot of tension between the Jews and Rome, and one of the main responsibilities of the Roman governors was to maintain peace which was no easy task

- d) This may explain why Festus only invited the Jewish elite to accompany him to Caesarea—while he was generally considered to be good and honest, he was prone to political influence:

“What is often overlooked in the discussion of these chapters by biblical scholars is the difference between Roman law and Roman officials, between what was legally the case and what was actually the case. In other words, what gets overlooked is the social networks and channels of influence. As we shall see, Roman law was indeed on Paul's side—he was not guilty of a chargeable offense. This does not mean that local Roman officials would necessarily be on Paul's side just because he was a Roman citizen. While Festus appears to have been more honest and less venal than either Felix or Albinus (the governor after Festus), this does not mean in the end that he was not subject to influence by means of the elite in the land, even if at first he resisted such influence. Since throughout the Empire provincial governors depended on the support of the local elites to secure peace, order, and justice, this inevitably made these governors subject to the influences of the elites. The reciprocity conventions also made this almost inevitable. If the Jewish elites cooperated with the procurator, they would expect ‘favors’ in return.” (Witherington, 719)

B. Festus hears Paul's case (Acts 25:6-12)

1. The Jewish elites bring their charges against Paul (READ 25:6-8):
 - a. After just over a week in Jerusalem, Festus and the Jewish elites travel back to Jerusalem
 - b. The next day, Festus convened a trial when the elites present their case against Paul:
 - 1) Luke only summarizes the charges as “**many and serious**” but based on Paul's response and what we've seen in earlier passages, they accuse Paul of mainly two things:
 - a) He was guilty of crimes against the Jews: in previous passages we saw that they accused Paul of preaching against the Law, and Moses, and the Jewish people, and that he had defiled (or attempted to defile) the temple by taking Gentiles into the inner courts
 - b) He was guilty of crimes against Rome: before Felix, they had accused him of being a “**pest**” (lit. plague), stirring up rebellion against Rome among the Jews—in fact, he was a ringleader of a dangerous, heretical cult (“**sect of the Nazarenes**”)
 - 2) So they attempted to make Paul both an enemy of the Jewish people and of Rome itself—both deserving of death if true
 - c. However, their case had one fatal flaw: they couldn't prove their charges and Paul continued to declare his innocence (RE-READ 7d and 8)

**how might we expect a good and righteous, justice-minded governor to respond?

2. In spite of the lack of evidence, and Paul maintaining his innocence, Festus sought to send Paul back to Jerusalem to be tried, presumably by the Sanhedrin (READ 25:9):
 - a. Right out of the gate, the Bible tells us that Festus was “**wishing (e.g. hoping) to do the Jews a favor**”
 - b. So, he asked Paul if he would be willing to go back to Jerusalem to be tried:
 - 1) Some take the phrase “**stand trial before he**” to mean that Festus was simply suggesting a change of location and that he would conduct the trial himself, but in Jerusalem rather than Caesarea
 - 2) However, Paul's response in v. 10-11 where he refuses the offer and defends his right to be tried in a Roman court suggests that Festus was proposing that Paul stand trial before the Sanhedrin, though possibly under his observation

- c. Based on what we learn in the verses that follow, Festus wasn't sure what to do with Paul:
 - 1) He knew Paul wasn't guilty of any crimes against Rome
 - 2) He became convinced that the real issue was a dispute between Paul and the Jews over religious matters, specifically over Jesus having risen from the dead
 - 3) However, rather than release him and run the risk of upsetting the Jewish elite, he succumbed to the political pressure and sought to find a way to appease the Jews by letting them try Paul

- 3. Realizing he wasn't going to get a fair trial; Paul appealed to Caesar (READ 25:10-12):
 - a. Paul had been accused of crimes against Rome, and he was being tried in a Roman court—right where he should be tried:
 - 1) He was willing to be executed if found guilty of anything deserving of death
 - 2) He hadn't wronged the Jews, **and Festus knew this**, so there was no reason for him to be sent back to Jerusalem, handed over to the Jews, and tried by the Sanhedrin
 - 3) Paul's response to Festus should be seen as a stern rebuke of Festus—while he was generally considered a good and fair leader as stated above, he was prone to political influence and that is being seen here

 - b. As a result, knowing he wasn't going to get a fair trial, he appealed to Caesar:
 - 1) What Paul does here was known as a provocatio (pro-voc-a-tee-o)
 - 2) It was originally an appeal to have one's case heard by the people of Rome, but by Paul's day it had been replaced by a hearing in the Emperor's personal court which was the court of last resort
 - 3) The equivalent here in the U.S. might be a direct appeal to the Supreme Court even before a ruling has been issued by a lower court

 - c. After discussing Paul's appeal with his council, Festus agrees to send Paul to Caesar (12)

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| C. Festus seeks the advice of King Agrippa (READ Acts 25:13-22) |
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- 1. As we'll learn next week, Festus has a dilemma:
 - a. He's found Paul guilty of nothing, but because Paul has appealed to Caesar he is bound to send him
 - b. However, he has no clue what charges to include in the letter to the Emperor
 - c. Essentially, he is sending Paul to be tried by the Emperor but has nothing to charge him with!

- 2. Fortunately for him, King Agrippa and Bernice arrive in Caesarea to pay their respects (likely to congratulate him on his new role as governor):
 - a. They were likely there to congratulate him on his new role as governor
 - b. Who was King Agrippa?
 - 1) Ruled the areas outside of Judea on behalf of Rome
 - 2) He was half Jewish, had a reputation for being very pious in religious matters, was an expert in Jewish issues, but was also a faithful subject of Rome—he even sided with the Romans in their war against the Jews that led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70

 - c. Who was Bernice?
 - 1) Some sources refer to her as Queen Bernice

- 2) She was Agrippa's sister (full)
 - 3) She had been married three times, widowed twice, divorced once, then moved in with Agrippa and served as queen
 - 4) When rumors began that they were having an incestuous relationship, to cover it up she convinced the King of Cilicia to marry her and convert to Judaism, only to divorce him a short time later and return to Agrippa
 - 5) She then became the mistress of Emperor Vespasian's son, Titus, who ultimately sent her away due to public pressure
3. Festus lays out his dilemma to King Agrippa:
 - a. Paul had been left in prison by Felix
 - b. When he went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and leaders accused Paul of all sorts of crimes and demanding that Paul be condemned and handed over to them
 - c. Because it was not the custom of Romans to hand over any man before he could face his accusers and defend himself, he conducted a trial in Caesarea
 - d. However, he discovered at the trial that their charges weren't what he expected—the real issue was purely disagreements over religion, specifically regarding **“a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive”** (19)
 - e. He admits to King Agrippa that he had no clue how to **“investigate such matters”** so he tried to get Paul to agree to go back to Jerusalem to be tried, again presumably by the Sanhedrin
 - f. When Paul refused and appealed to Caesar, Festus ordered him held until he could send him to Caesar
 4. After listening to Festus, King Agrippa asks to hear from Paul and Festus agrees (22)

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| Conclusion |
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Takeaways:

1. The first takeaway is this: justice is supposed to be blind, but often is not:
 - a. There are biases, assumptions, social and political influences, agendas, and even outright corruption introduced at every step in the process from arrest, investigation, trial, and sentencing
 - b. Paul faced all of these, more than once, and he certainly faced it here before Festus
2. The second takeaway is this: in spite of this, the Lord commands us to submit ourselves and honor those who are in authority because it honors Him:
 - a. We're all familiar with what Paul wrote in Romans 13; it begins with, **“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”**
 - b. Did you know Paul wrote this AFTER he and Silas had been mistreated by the city magistrates and legal system in Philippi where they were arrested, stripped naked, beaten with rods, tossed in prison, and locked in stocks?
 - c. At the end of his life, he wrote to Titus (3:1), **“Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedience, to be ready for every good deed.”**—this was not only after his experiences with Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, but from a prison cell during his second arrest shortly before being executed!

3. The third takeaway is this: there is more at stake than the injustice we might face; there is God's purpose and plan:
 - a. In Paul's case, we've seen how God's plan was for Paul to testify about Jesus before Jews and Gentiles, city leaders, Roman governors, and even kings and emperors
 - b. We may not know exactly how the injustices we face are part of God's purpose and plan, but the Bible assures us that they are and that God will reward those who faithfully serve Him to the end