

## **The Acts of the Holy Spirit 28 – Another trial this time before Festus - Chapter 25.**

Two years had now passed since Paul had been saved from the lynching mob in Jerusalem by the commander of the garrison who delivered him to Felix in Caesarea. Felix had been recalled to Rome and had lost his job. Now Festus had taken over and within three days of arriving in his new post he decided to go up to Jerusalem (literally up for Jerusalem is some 7,000 feet above Caesarea which is on the coast).

### **Acts 25:1-12**

Paul was still in prison; although the guards had been instructed to give him some freedom and to let his friends visit him, and take care of his needs. Felix had hoped that by now, Paul would have offered him a bribe to be released, but Paul had not done so. Finally at his departure from Caesarea, he had attempted to curry favour with the Jews and had left Paul in prison to please them.

Now Festus was in Jerusalem. True to form, the chief priests and Jewish leaders had not forgotten about Paul. He was their number one wanted man, and so they appeared before Festus and presented the charges against Paul, **Acts 25:1-2**

The charges were:

1. He was a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews around the world;
2. He was the ringleader of an unrecognised religious sect, which was against Roman law; and
3. He had tried to desecrate the temple.

These people had not changed one bit. They were not interested in bringing Paul to trial. Like the first time they attempted to get hold of him, (**Acts 23:12-15**) now they still wanted to kill him and be done with it! **Acts 25:3-5**

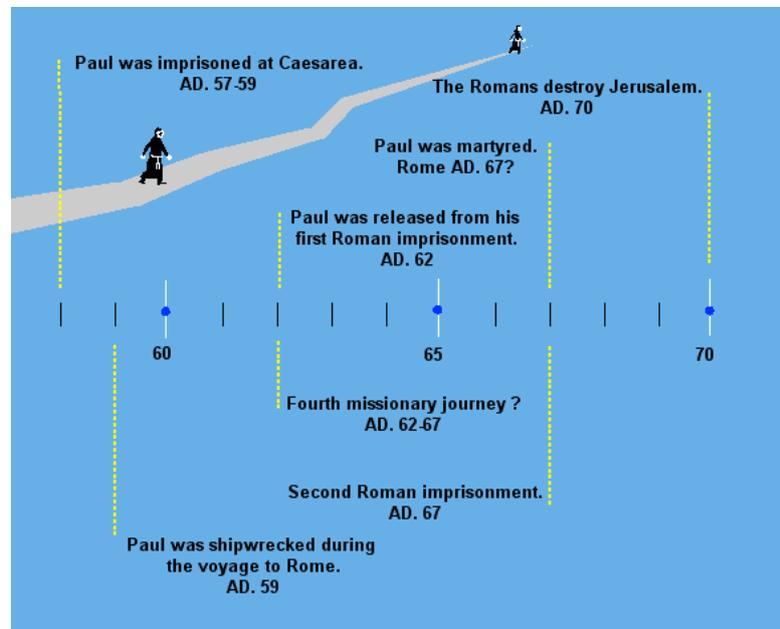
But it still was not God's plan to have Paul's life thrown away. He had many more things for him to accomplish. When God calls you and me to follow him, it is for a purpose, and as we read in the Book of Job,

Then Job replied to the Lord: I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. **Job 42:1-2**

The Lord has promised never to leave us or forsake us, (**Joshua 1:5 LB**) and if we stick with Him, He will see us through. He will carry us where necessary and He will support us through thick and thin. As the chorus says to us, 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His Glory and Grace'. But it is **His** Glory and Grace, not ours, or anyone else's that will carry us through!

Festus returned to Caesarea after spending a period of 8 or 10 days with the chief priests and Jewish leaders, and the following day the trial began. Festus ordered Paul to be brought before him. When Paul appeared, the Bible states '.....the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove'. **Acts 25:7** The time had now come for Paul to make his defence. He states amazingly 'I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the Temple or against Caesar.' **Acts 25:8**

He was adamant – he stated quite clearly that he had not opposed the Jewish Laws – and we know from all the evidence in the previous chapters that wherever he went on his journeys, he was at pains to try to get alongside the Jews, furthermore, we know that he kept the Laws specifically when he returned to Jerusalem from his travels immediately before the Jews tried to kill him, in respect of the vows that he had taken.



1. Paul rejected the idea that the Old Testament laws bring salvation to those who keep them. Our salvation is freely given by God's gracious act. We receive salvation through faith. The laws are of no value for salvation except to show us our sin.
2. Paul accepted the view that the Old Testament laws prepare us for and teach us about the coming of Jesus Christ. Christ fulfilled the law and released us from its burden of guilt. But the law still teaches us many valuable principles and gives us guidelines for grateful living. Paul was not observing the laws in order to be saved. He was simply keeping the laws as custom to avoid offending those he wished to reach with the gospel (see **Romans 3:21-31; 7:4-6; 13:9, 10**). For more on the law, see **Galatians 3:23-29; 4:21-31**,

He had certainly not desecrated the Temple as the Jews tried to accuse him. The Bible tells us this, **Acts 21:29**. Neither had he rebelled against the Roman Government. Even Festus knew that. If Paul had done so, he would have been in chains awaiting execution for treason, whereas he was certainly in prison but all his needs were being met by his friends and he had relative freedom.

Religion and Politics are strange things, especially when mixed with ambition. They cause man to do odd things often against their conscience, but above all the result shows what a man's character really is like. Festus was a weak man driven by political ambition who had just spent time with the Jewish religious leaders in their capital city. Although he had said 'No' the first time, he was swayed by them when they asked him again to do them a favour by bringing Paul to Jerusalem for trial by the Sanhedrin. Festus felt powerless to resist. But this time, he put the question to Paul as if doing him a favour, **Acts 25:9**. Instead, all he was doing was trying to pass off his responsibility. What an unjust and incompetent man!



We see the same problems in the world today as leader after leader in Business and Government avoids facing up to the challenges of the moment and instead bow to the god of Capitalism in the form of money and profits without considering the fate of the poor of the country or even the world. Even where there does seem to be some willingness to give in to the calls to forgive debt that our poor neighbours have got into, there is little desire to carry out the promises given.

The Church faces the same problem as it grapples with the challenge of standing firm against the erosion of the principles of the Christian Faith by other faiths and secularism – faiths into whose hands we have played by not sharing with them the Love of God through our lives.

If our leaders will do nothing but procrastinate and compromise, it is time for us to stand up and take our authority in the Name of Jesus and declare our love for the God Who saved us, setting us free from the power of sin and death through Jesus dying in our place. He is the One Who paid the price which would otherwise be levied from each of us, Himself giving us Eternal Life – life with Him for evermore. We then need to change our lifestyles and begin to show all men how much God loves us and cares for us as we love and care for others, especially those in the Body of Christ.



The Governments cannot take the lead; in the main they do not know Jesus, our leaders seem reluctant to show us the leadership that they have been put in position to do, so those of us who know our God need to be prepared to put our Christian lives on the line. 'And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he (Satan) corrupt by flatteries: but the

people that do know their God shall do exploits'. **Daniel 11:32**. We have a responsibility as people of God not to waiver from the truth, so let us decide together to support one another in this resolve.

Paul's answer was clear and concise. He would have nothing to do with the shaky and double standards of Festus, 'I appeal to Caesar.' **Acts 25:10-11**. It was every Roman Citizen's right to be tried by a Court in Rome if he or she felt they were not getting justice from the local Roman courts, this is what Paul did. As we have seen, he was a Roman citizen, so that now put Festus on the spot. He knew very well that Paul was innocent, so sending him to be tried by Caesar would not look very good on his CV. So he conferred with his Counsel, then blustered and agreed, **Acts 25:12**

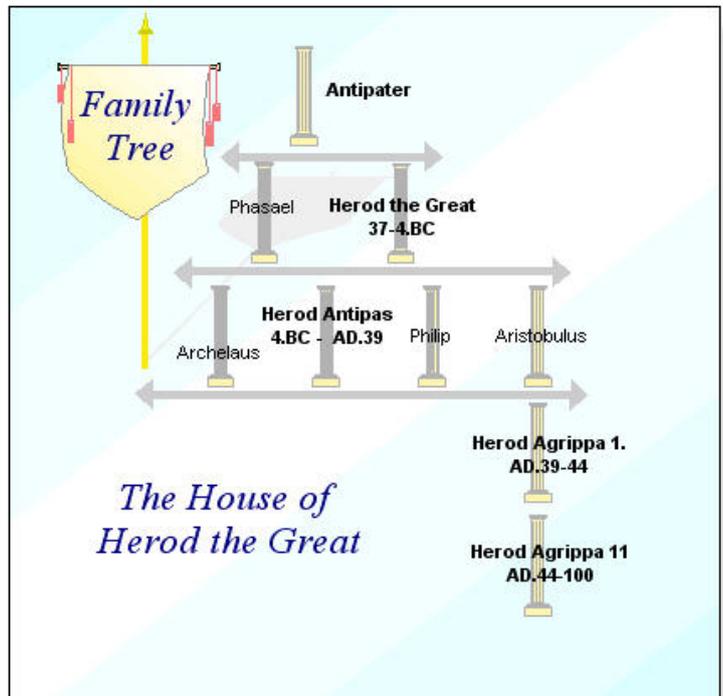
### **Acts 25:13-27**

That sounded big, didn't it? Perhaps no-one would notice in the hubbub that Festus had lost ..... a typically frightened man in a quandary over something that, as a decision, was as clear as day; we shall see later in the Book of Acts that Festus really knew what he should have done which was to free Paul.

God of course had other plans for Paul, so he used the stubborn and weak-minded Festus to commit Paul to a journey by sea to Rome. God sometimes takes his time to get people to places, so it was with Paul. He was to have another appointment in the Governor's Court in Caesarea. This was to be with King Agrippa.

This was Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I, and a descendant of Herod the Great. He had power over the temple, controlled the temple treasury, and could appoint and remove the high priest. Bernice was the sister of Herod Agrippa II. She married her uncle, Herod of Chalcis, became a mistress to her brother Agrippa II, then became mistress to the emperor Vespasian's son, Titus. Here Agrippa and Bernice were making an official visit to Festus. Agrippa, of Jewish descent, could help clarify Paul's case for Roman governor. Agrippa and Festus were anxious to cooperate in governing their neighbouring territories.

The Herod family had always been a bit short on morality. We can read in the Gospels about Herod Antipas who was Herod Agrippa II's grandfather:



<sup>1</sup> When King Herod heard about Jesus, <sup>2</sup> he said to his men, "This must be John the Baptist, come back to life again. That is why he can do these miracles." <sup>3</sup> For Herod had arrested John and chained him in prison at the demand of his wife Herodias, his brother Philip's ex-wife, <sup>4</sup> because John had told him it was wrong for him to marry her. <sup>5</sup> He would have killed John but was afraid of a riot, for all the people believed John was a prophet.

<sup>6</sup> But at a birthday party for Herod, Herodias' daughter performed a dance that greatly pleased him, <sup>7</sup> so he vowed to give her anything she wanted. <sup>8</sup> Consequently, at her mother's urging, the girl asked for John the Baptist's head on a tray.

<sup>9</sup> The king was grieved, but because of his oath, and because he didn't want to back down in front of his guests, he issued the necessary orders. <sup>10</sup> So John was beheaded in the prison, <sup>11</sup> and his head was brought on a tray and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. <sup>12</sup> Then John's disciples came for his body and buried it, and came to tell Jesus what had happened. **Matthew 14:1-12**

Festus was not only a weak man, but he was a liar also. Paul had been tried before Felix where the Jews had stated their case through Tertullus quite clearly, **Acts 24:22; 26-27**

So in his statement to King Agrippa (**Acts 25:14-21**) all that he was doing was showing how indecisive he was. Of course, as we have seen, God's plan was for Paul to go to Rome to preach the Gospel there.

Paul had done nothing worthy of punishment – far from it. He had shown the love of Jesus to everyone he met. He had ‘trodden on people’s toes’, and had shared his testimony with almost everyone he met, and as a result had incurred the wrath of the religious authorities. We need to understand that if we share our testimony with people, we also are going to come in for criticism, don’t be put off by it, just move on to the next; continue to use the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and to grow in the Grace of the Lord Jesus as you naturally exhibit the Fruit of the Spirit, people will want to know what makes you so different from the world. Agrippa said “I’d like to hear the man myself,” and Festus replied, “You shall - tomorrow!” **Acts 25:22.**

The next day must have been interesting. Agrippa and Bernice arrived in a convoy resplendent in their robes. Pomp and circumstance seem to interest those who have no intention of discovering their true destiny, and King Agrippa was no different. With him came the high ranking officers and the leading men of the City. Paul would now have his chance to reach all these men with the Gospel. Once they had heard, there was no longer any excuse for them, **Romans 1:20-22.**

So finally, we hear what we knew all along. Festus knew that there was no real charge against Paul (**Acts 25:23-27**). We shall see in Acts 26 how they all agree that:

‘This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment’. Agrippa said to Festus ‘this man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.’ **Acts 26:31-32**

So God would have His way. To Rome Paul would eventually go. He had not yet finished the race; the course was still before him. He would still prove to many people that Jesus is alive, and that He is a great and Living God who is desperately interested in the affairs and affections of men.

Where do you and I stand with Jesus? Have you made certain of where you will spend eternity? Do you know beyond a shadow of doubt that if you died tonight, you would be in Heaven with Jesus forever?

You can no longer afford to be indecisive about such important matters as your eternal future. Do not be weak like Felix and Festus, but be strong and upright like Paul. If you are wondering about any area of your life, spend time at the throne of grace and seek His wisdom and then obey. It is in obedience that there is power in the Christian life and fulfilment and satisfaction comes from Him alone.

## **Acts of the Holy Spirit 28 – Another trial this time before Festus - Challenge Questions**

**Please complete all questions marked with \* and then complete the rest of the study. The more you look in the Word the more you will get out of it.**

**Read the chapter at the beginning of the week then you have time to meditate on it, rather than rushing! Make the Word your number one priority.**

- 1. \*Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that 'speak' to you and share with the group.
- 2. \*How do you react to being misrepresented?** Could you give an example from your own life and the reasons for your reaction?
- 3. Why do you think it took so long for Paul to get to Rome?** Can you give any good reasons for the time delay and what Paul did with his time?
- 4. Do you have any area of your life where you need to make a tough decision but you are being indecisive?** Do you need prayer support?

### **Read Acts 26:1-8**

- 5. \*Paul had an amazing opportunity to give his testimony. If you had an opportunity to share how Jesus has changed your life, would you be able to do it?** Write out your testimony – not just about what happened when you became a Christian, but include what Jesus is doing in your life today, making it relevant to someone who might want to hear. Be prepared to share it with the Group in no more than two minutes.
- 6. Paul was, like his father before him, a Pharisee. List three good things about Pharisees and three not so good points. Why do you think Paul use the fact that he was a Pharisee at this point in his testimony to King Agrippa and Bernice?**
- 7. \*Paul indicated to King Agrippa that if anyone was going to Heaven by being good, he was. What reasons did he have for saying this, and why were these reasons useless?**

**Read Acts 26:9-32**

- 8.** Explain how you can tell when someone is a Christian when you are talking to them.
  
- 9.** \*How can a church bring the Word of God to no effect? **Matthew 15:6**. Could this happen in your church? Explain. Suggest how you could stop this happening in your church and in your own life
  
- 10.** Write down why it is important that you explain to another person the change that Jesus has made to your life after you became a Believer. Why is it important that your testimony is up-to-date? Is God doing things in your life now? If there has not been any change recently, why could that be?
  
- 11.** \*Explain what happened on the road to Damascus. Jesus explained to Paul what he would be commissioned to do. What protection would Paul have needed and how had that worked out in his life. Do you need protection in your Christian life and if so why? What protection are you familiar with?
  
- 12.** When we became Believers, what spiritual change took place in our lives? Why could this change never be temporary? Explain how knowledge of this change has affected your own life.
  
- 13.** \*When Paul gave his testimony, who was it to. Write down how each that is mentioned responded. Why did they respond like that? Can you identify with any of the responses? Give examples from either your own life or the lives of people with whom you have shared your testimony.
  
- 14.** \*Identify the events of the last days of Jesus' life that King Agrippa would have been most familiar with; and which he would have been most concerned about.
  
- 15.** Have you decided to change anything in your life as a result of reading this passage of the Bible? Would you like to share it with the Group? Why do you think that it is helpful to others to share such things?