

PAUL'S TRIAL BEFORE FESTUS AND AGRIPPA

Acts 25:1 - 26:32

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Paul, Festus, and King Agrippa

Key-location: Caesarea

Key-repetitions:

- Judicial trials: Jewish leaders brought accusations against Paul before Governor Festus (Ac 25:6-7); Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to stand trial in Jerusalem (Ac 25:9); Paul appealed to be tried by Emperor Caesar (Ac 25:10-11); Paul defended himself before King Agrippa (Ac 26:1); Paul said he was on trial because he expected God to keep his promises (Ac 26:6).
- Condemned: Paul declared he was innocent and didn't deserve the death penalty (Ac 25:11); Festus told Agrippa that Jewish leaders asked for Paul to be condemned (Ac 25:15); the Jewish community petitioned Festus to kill Paul, but Paul didn't deserve the death penalty (Ac 25:24-25); Paul told King Agrippa that Jews seized him in the temple courts and tried to kill him (Ac 26:21); Festus and King Agrippa agreed that Paul didn't deserve death or imprisonment (Ac 26:31).
- Dead, brought back to life: Festus told Agrippa that Paul's accusers argued with him about a dead man who Paul claimed was alive (Ac 25:19); Paul told Agrippa that it is not incredible that God brings the dead back to life (Ac 26:8); Paul told Agrippa that Moses and the prophets said that Christ would be the first to come back to life from the dead (Ac 26:22-23).
- Paul's ministry: God appointed him as a servant and a witness, and sent him to non-Jews (Ac 26:16-17); Paul preached to both Jews and non-Jews (Ac 26:20); Paul desired that all his listeners would become Christians (Ac 26:29).

Key-attitudes:

- Jews' hatred of Paul.
- Festus' confusion as to what to do about Paul.
- Festus and Agrippa's certainty that Paul didn't deserve punishment.
- Paul's passion when he spoke.

Initial-situation:

Paul was in Jerusalem where Jews from Asia falsely accused Paul of bringing non-Jews into the temple courtyard. A mob seized Paul and began to beat him. The Roman commander rescued and arrested Paul. The crowd kept shouting, "Kill him!"

The commander discovered that some Jews conspired to kill Paul, and he sent Paul to Governor Felix in Caesarea. Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor, so he left Paul in prison for two years.

Initial-problem:

Governor Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus. Jewish leaders requested for Festus to send Paul to Jerusalem.

Final-situation:

Paul could have been set free if he had not asked for the emperor to hear his case.

BIBLE STORY

Two years passed with Paul in prison. Governor Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus. The chief priest and other Jewish leaders requested for Governor Festus to send Paul to Jerusalem. Jews planned to ambush and kill Paul as he traveled to Jerusalem. Governor Festus ordered the Jewish leaders to travel to Caesarea and bring their accusations against Paul. Jewish leaders traveled from Jerusalem to Caesarea to make charges against Paul. Governor Festus convened the court. The Jews brought serious charges against Paul, which they could not prove. Paul defended himself, "I haven't disobeyed any Jewish law nor wronged the temple nor the emperor."

Governor Festus wished to please the Jews, so he asked Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial on these charges with me as your judge?"

Paul answered, "I'm innocent. I don't deserve the death penalty. The Jews' charges against me are false. No one has the right to hand me over to the Jews. I appeal to Emperor Caesar!"

Governor Festus declared, "You've appealed to Emperor Caesar in Rome. To Emperor Caesar you'll go!" (Ac 25:1-12).

A few days later, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice arrived in Caesarea to pay respects to Governor Festus. Governor Festus discussed Paul's case with King Agrippa. Governor Festus said, "Felix left a prisoner named Paul here. The chief priests and Jewish elders asked that Paul be condemned, and I convened the court. Paul's accusers didn't charge him with any crime. They argued with Paul about their own religious beliefs and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. I asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem and stand trial for these charges. Paul made his appeal to go before the emperor; therefore, I ordered him held until I could send him to Emperor Caesar" (Ac 25:13-21).

King Agrippa told Governor Festus, "I'd like to hear this man myself."

Governor Festus replied, "Tomorrow you'll hear him."

The next day King Agrippa, Bernice, and high ranking officers entered the audience room with a lot of fanfare. Paul was brought before them. Governor Festus said, "King Agrippa, the whole Jewish community has petitioned me to kill this man. I have found that he doesn't deserve the death penalty. Paul made his appeal to the Emperor, so I'm sending him to Rome. However, I've nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore, I brought him before all of you so that as a result of this investigation, I may have something to write" (Ac 25:22-27).

King Agrippa told Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

Paul began his defense, "King Agrippa, I'm fortunate today to defend myself before you. You're acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies.

"If the Jews were willing, they could testify that I lived as a Pharisee. I'm on trial today because I expect God to keep the promises he made to our ancestors. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God brings the dead back to life?

"I too was convinced that I ought to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The chief priest in Jerusalem gave me authority to put Christians in prison. I cast my vote to put them to death. I was obsessed. I even went to foreign cities to persecute Christians.

"The chief priest gave me authority to go to Damascus. I was on the road when about noon I saw a bright light from heaven, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground. I heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? You are hurting yourself by fighting me.'

"I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

"The Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you're persecuting. Get up. I appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you've seen of me and what I'll show you. I'll rescue you from your own Jewish people and from the non-Jews. I'm sending you to non-Jews to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and to free non-Jews from Satan's power to God's power. Then they will receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are made holy by believing in me.'

"King Agrippa, I obeyed this vision from heaven. First in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and all Judea, and also to non-Jews. I preached that both groups should repent, turn to God, and prove their repentance by their changed lives. That's why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. However, God has helped me to this very day. I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I tell everyone what the prophets and Moses said would happen. Christ would suffer and be the first to come back to life from the dead, and would proclaim light to his own people and to the non-Jews" (Ac 26:1-23).

Governor Festus interrupted, shouting, "You're out of your mind, Paul! Too much study is driving you insane."

Paul replied, "I'm not insane, most excellent Governor Festus. My words are true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things. It wasn't done in a corner. King Agrippa, I know you believe the prophets!"

King Agrippa asked Paul, "Do you think that you can quickly persuade me to be a Christian?"

Paul replied, "Short or long time; I pray to God that not only you, but every person listening to me today would become what I am, except for these chains."

The audience left the room. They said to each other, "This man doesn't deserve death or imprisonment."

King Agrippa said to Governor Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not asked for Emperor Caesar to hear his case" (Ac 26:24-32).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Two years passed after Paul's trial before Governor Felix. The Jewish leaders still desired to kill Paul. What does this show about the Jewish leaders' desires against Paul?
2. What can we learn about facing injustices by the way Paul faced:
 - An unjust imprisonment?
 - False accusations?
 - Politicians' delaying tactics that prevented justice?
3. Why did Paul appeal to be tried by Emperor Caesar?
4. What problem did Governor Festus face and how did he hope King Agrippa would help?
5. What kind of defense did Paul present to King Agrippa?
6. What was Paul's primary goal in his speech to King Agrippa?
7. What difference does it make to you that Jesus came back to life after death?
8. Paul told how he became a follower of Jesus. How did you become a follower of Jesus?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Government authorities who reject God, can't prevent God from advancing his Kingdom.** In a vision, the Lord promised that Paul would reach his objective of preaching in Rome (Ac 23:11). Even though the Jewish and the Roman authorities rejected Paul and the God whom he served, God made it possible for Paul to go to Rome (Ac 25:10-12).
2. **An undesirable opportunity is better than no opportunity.** Halitosis (offensive breath) is better than no breath. Paul desired to preach the gospel in Rome (Rom 1:10). Paul's appeal to the emperor would give him the opportunity to go to Rome (Ac 25:8). To go to Rome as a prisoner was better than not to go at all.
3. **Christians should turn problems into opportunities.** Paul was in prison, but he made the best of the situation. Important military officers and city leaders accompanied King Agrippa to hear Paul speak. Paul saw the audience as an opportunity to present the gospel (Ac 25:23 - 26:29).

4. **Others may view Christians as insane; however, to Christians, temporary benefits are inferior to eternal privileges.** Paul risked his life to preach a message that was offensive to the Jews and unbelievable to the non-Jews. To Governor Festus, Paul was insane to risk so much to gain what appeared to be so little (Ac 26:24).
5. **Christians need a burning desire to see others come to Christ, a desire so strong that it overshadows their problems.** Paul was more concerned for the salvation of listeners, who were strangers, than for the removal of his own chains (Ac 26:28-29).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Twitter Prayers (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in “twitter” length prayers.

- Tell God how they feel about the story.
- Pray for Christians who are persecuted or imprisoned because of their faith.
- Pray for people who hate Christians so much that they want to kill them.
- Talk to God about decisions they need to make as a result of hearing the story.