

Taking it to the Top – Acts 25 and 26



After Paul had been kept prisoner for two years in Caesarea, the provincial capital of Judaea, Felix was succeeded by a new governor, Festus. After taking up his duties in Caesarea, Festus visited Jerusalem, where the Jewish authorities seized the opportunity of once again bringing up their charges against Paul. On his return to Caesarea, Festus took some of them with him. They made various accusations about Paul, but, as before, failed to prove anything illegal against him. Festus naturally wanted to be on good terms with the Jewish leaders, so he suggested to Paul that he could be returned to Jerusalem to be tried there. This would have been like sending him back to the lions' den, so at this point Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to be tried by the highest authority in the Empire – the Emperor himself, in Rome.

Before Paul could begin his journey to Rome, King Agrippa and his wife, Bernice, paid a visit to Festus, to welcome him as the new governor. Agrippa was a great grandson of Herod the Great, who had been king when Jesus was born. Like his forbears, Agrippa reigned with Rome's permission, and was subject to the Roman Emperor. Festus discussed Paul's situation with the king, who decided he would like to hear Paul himself.

The next day Paul was brought before the king. Festus, as a Roman, was still quite bewildered about what offences the Jewish leaders were accusing him of having committed. He hoped the Jewish King Agrippa would make some sense of it all, so that he could provide the Emperor with a proper account of what charges were being brought against Paul.

Paul took the opportunity to give his personal testimony before the king. When he described his conversion experience and spoke of his evangelistic work among both Jews

and Gentiles, Festus could make no sense of it, and decided Paul must be crazy. Paul, however, addressed Agrippa, in quite flattering terms, as one who would understand about the Law and the writings of the prophets. The king asked him, probably with some sarcasm, “In this short time, do you think you will make me a Christian?” Paul replied that his prayer was that Agrippa and the others would all come to share his beliefs. That, of course, was Paul’s aim in all his dealings with people, high or low – to bring them to faith in his Saviour.

Paul certainly appears to have made a favourable impression on the king. Following the hearing, Agrippa and Bernice, Festus and the other officials who had been present agreed that Paul had done nothing to warrant his imprisonment. Agrippa told Festus that if he had not appealed to the Emperor, Paul could have been released. As he had made his appeal, however, to Rome he must go.

A prayer:

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,
wherever you may place me,
in all that I do and in all that I may endure;
when there is work for me and when there is none;
when I am troubled and when I am at peace.
Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded;
when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking;
when I have all things, and when I have nothing.
I willingly offer all I have and am
to serve you, as and when you choose.
Glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.
May it be so for ever.
Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. AMEN
(The Covenant Service)

- Rev John Barnett

Image: Paulus before Agrippa. Nikolai Bodarevskij (1850–1921).