

Acts 25:9: *'But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?'¹⁰ Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.¹¹ For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. **I appeal unto Caesar.'***

Verse 12: *'Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.'*

Under the leading of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Festus have set in motion God's next mission for Paul; he will, he must go to Rome. There, he will be confined but allowed visitors where he will proclaim the Gospel to the Salvation of even some of Caesar's household and he will begin writing his Epistles...

This really is huge! To Rome!

Verse 13: *'And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.'*

Agrippa is the 'client king' ruling over Judea, under the control of Rome; Bernice is his sister, the client queen over Judea. It was rumored that they carried on an incestuous relationship.

King Agrippa comes to Caesarea to 'salute' Festus the representative for real authority, Rome. That would have to have been humiliating for Agrippa and Bernice, as was the intent.

Verse 14: *'And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:'*

Paul is still confined from Felix' time as the Roman governor who has kept Paul confined for 2 years, bringing him in often, hoping for a bribe but also hearing the Gospel from Paul during each visit.

Now, Festus has taken over as Roman governor and he has kept Paul confined. Even now, with Agrippa's arrival, he has waited 'many days' to mention Paul.

Festus tells Agrippa: *'There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix...'*

Verse 15: *'About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.¹⁶ To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.'*

Our own government was formed on Biblical principles but also upon Roman Law: the accused has the right to face his accuser and is allowed to testify on his own behalf; it is to his credit that Festus did not succumb to pressure from the Jews to hand Paul over to them, unlike week Pilate, some 30 years before, but to his rebuke that he kept Paul confined even though he had broken no law and no proof was ever leveled against him.

What about Paul... his attitude? From Rome, he will write: *'Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.¹² I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.¹³ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.'* Philippians 4:11

Paul knew he was in God's Hand; God was in complete control; he could trust God with his very life. If God wanted him to be kept for 2 years in the ideal climate of Caesarea, eating good food, sleeping on a bed, being allowed visitors and ministers... with the privilege of preaching the Gospel to the most powerful man in all of Israel... so be it. He knew, like Joseph, whose story he had long ago memorized and taken to heart: 'What the Jews meant for evil, God meant for good.' Genesis 50:20

Verse 17: *'Therefore, when they (the Jews) were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.¹⁸ Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:¹⁹ But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.'*

This does, however, speak to the weakness of Festus; he didn't have the courage to simply release Paul since the Jews' only charge, as far as Festus could ascertain, was Paul's *superstitious belief* that someone was alive whom the Jews claimed was dead. To Festus, this would have been no more significant than if, to us, some random Mormon claimed he had seen Joseph Smith come back to life... big deal! We're not going to put him in jail or even hand him over to the Mormons if they are seeking his death. Paul, Jesus, the Word of God... they all mean a great deal to us but to the World... nothing but hatred. The same is true, here; Rome couldn't care less about Paul, Jesus and Christians except in so far as they appeared to interfere with the smooth running machine of the Roman Empire. A huge part of that machine is the demand that everyone everywhere worship Caesar as god on Earth which, of course, Paul, Jesus and True Christians could never do. Remember what the Jews cried out to Pilate: *'We have no king but Caesar!'*

And, by the way, you don't hate something you consider to be merely imaginary; no one genuinely hates the monster under his child's bed. The fact that they hate Jesus Christ, today, is the very proof of the Truth of His Life and Mission. The fact that they hate Him is the proof that they really do know He is real! And that is why they hate us, as well. We likely wouldn't take a school system to court to stop a teacher from claiming the tooth fairy is real, so long as he was not demanding our child share in his fantasy; we would simply teach our children the truth.

Verse 20: *'And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. ²¹ But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar. ²² Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.'*

I commanded! I am the authority here! But I didn't have the courage to make a judgment. This, I think, shows the cowardice of Festus; he know full well that if Paul agreed to return to Jerusalem to be judged by the Jews, he would quickly be condemned to death but Festus didn't have the courage to stand up to the Jews. Remember, his position and power depended upon his ability to keep the Peace. Now Festus hopes he might hand this whole mess over to Agrippa since he is, after all, 'king of the Jews,' but, at the very least, he is glad that Paul, himself, took it out of Festus' hand and forced it into Caesar's.

Verse 23: *'And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.'*

Agrippa and Bernice demand great pomp, a great spectacle for the people of Caesarea and Festus is all for it; he needs to keep these two content in order to not allow any seed of rebellion to ever take root; it would have been the vassal king in any province who would seek to rebel, believing himself to be the rightful king over all. It had to really gall Agrippa and Bernice to be subservient to this simple Roman 'governor' but that's how politics works all around the World and throughout history: one group seeking to gain power while plotting their adversary's destruction.

Then, in the middle of this circus, Festus commands that Paul be brought forth like a gladiator standing before a coliseum filled with those calling for his death. This is just one more display of power, letting everyone know that the real seat of power is not in Jerusalem, but in Caesarea.

Verse 24: *'And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.'*

Doesn't this sound, suspiciously, like 30 years ago when these same Jews were thirsting for the Blood of Jesus? Then Pilate, the Roman governor at that time, put Jesus on display and said, 'Behold, the Man!' Here, Festus, the Roman governor puts Paul, Jesus' representative, on display and says, 'See this man!' And, like Pilate, Festus is saying, '**see me**, the man in charge!'

All the Jewish leadership is but a secondary power or even tertiary behind Agrippa; all the Jews demanded this man's execution but I, says Festus, representing Rome, have the final say; I stand alone in this Province as the

real power... (that is, so long as I can keep the peace which is the only reason that I placate these Jews at all... including you, Agrippa! If it were up to me, I'd wipe you all out which, by the way, is exactly what my friend, general Titus will do in about 10 years hence.)

Verse 25: *'But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.'*

Now Festus is, again, showing his cowardice; for fear of the Jews, for fear of any uprising, he is careful to say, 'My hands are tied; yes, I found no fault in him, (again, like Pilate) but since he appealed to Caesar, I must send him to Rome; don't you see... it's not my fault; this is the law to which I, like you, must adhere; I'm sorry, Jews.'

Verse 26: *'Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. ²⁷ For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.'*

He has broken no Roman Law; he is not guilty before Rome; I have brought him out specifically unto you, Agrippa, because you are a Jew; hopefully you can make sense of all the crimes being alleged by all these Jews; help me out here, Agrippa; I need to have something making sense of the situation in order to write to Rome, making me to sound intelligent and in complete control of the whole matter. I don't want to look stupid before Caesar; that is my foremost consideration, above all else.

Acts 26:1: *'Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:'*

Now Agrippa wants to put forth that he is in charge of these proceedings; 'I give you permission to speak.'

Verse 2: *'I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:'*

Finally, Paul says; I can give a true response to all the lies by these Jews I have been accused and they are all lies!

Verse 3: *'Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.'*

Paul is, once again, showing his brilliance as a trial lawyer; he tells Agrippa that his expertise is recognized, by Paul, and appreciated so, 'Please patiently listen to all I say because I am going to, as always, say far more than just my defense; I am going to give you the Gospel, Agrippa which I recognize as one of God's purposes in having me here.' By the way, seeing that Paul has been kept in Caesarea for the past 2 years while the Jews have doubtless been working to drum up pressure to have him killed, it seems odd that it is only now that Agrippa and Bernice have gotten around to paying any attention to this; Paul has to have become quite famous or infamous, depending on one's attitude... you'd think they would have been involved far sooner.

Paul continues...

Verse 4: *'My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; ⁵ Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.'*

I'm not some foreigner or a Hellenized Jew; I am from here; from the beginning I've been a Pharisee; I studied under Pharisees; I was diligent and scrupulously faithful to all the Jewish Law and all these Jews know this to be absolutely true, if they were but honest enough to testify to this truth; they've all known me since I was a boy.

Verse 6: *'And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers: ⁷ Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.'*

If, Agrippa, you do, in fact, know the Scriptures as well as to which I alluded, then you know that the Writings of our own Prophets are filled with God's Promises to us, His chosen nation. He promised, from the beginning, to send a Deliverer: Genesis 3, Who is the Lord Jesus Christ Who was prophesied to be crucified: Psalm 22,

Isaiah 53, and resurrected: Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3, Psalm 16:10. He is the One to Whom all the Law and Prophets pointed; He is the fulfillment of all of God's Word!

And so, Agrippa, I am being hounded by these Jews for the crime of believing God's Word!

Verse 8: *'Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?'*

'Surely, Agrippa, I am correct in knowing that you are wise enough to see the Truth of what I say; all these other Jews are bereft of wisdom but certainly not you, Agrippa; I know you, in your wisdom, must see reality!'

Verse 9: *'I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.'*

Let me be honest with you, Agrippa; I will not seek to portray myself in any other light than to fully admit my past guilt; I was like these same Jews, then, and so, I now see their gross error in rejecting the Truth of God's Word and Promises.

Verse 10: *'Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.'*

I was like these Jews who now seek my death as a Christian. In fact, it was some of these same Jews who sent me on my missions of death to Christians. They were wrong then and I was wrong then but now, I see Truth and reality; they are still so terribly wrong.

Verse 11: *'And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. ¹² Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,'*

Now we are reminded of just who Paul used to be; he, doubtless, has never forgotten who he was and what he had done. In fact, he used to do, to Christians, what these Jews have done to him throughout his years of ministry; he persecuted Christians even unto strange cities as have the Jews to him.

Remembering his past and God's Mercy is what would cause Paul to later write: *'And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; ¹³ Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. ¹⁶ Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.'* 1 Timothy 1:12

Paul continues his testimony before Agrippa...

Verse 13: *'At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.'*

We remember this from chapter 9...

Verse 14: *'And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.'*

Here we learn that all of those with Paul on his fateful 'road to Damascus' fell to the ground as well. In chapter 9 it only says that Paul was thrown to the ground which is usually the assumption but it doesn't actually say that he was the only one.

'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' This is such an important phrase. The 'pricks' are cattle goads used to control and direct an animal. God is saying that it becomes difficult for us when we resist God's direction; He will use His goad as often and as hard as necessary until we willingly go the direction He is leading. God will always fulfill His Will; the only question is whether we will submit to His Will or resist His Will until the goad finally becomes too painful to endure; if we submit quickly and easily, we will be blessed; if we resist, we will find it painful; Paul learned quickly to no longer kick against the pricks; hopefully we do so too.