

Fact Sheet for "I Appeal to Caesar"

Acts 25:1-22

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We live in a country largely founded with the idea of religious freedom. In fact one whole state (Pennsylvania) was settled with this idea. Our money has the motto "In God We Trust." We live under US and state law. Many of those laws are consistent with the Bible, some are not. But our faith must always remain with God (Prov. 3:5-6)! Remember, Paul lived under a more corrupt government than ours... Rome. Consider now one of Paul's defenses in Acts and see how God had Paul to use Roman law to achieve His (God's) purposes.

There are several places in Acts where one verse stands out. In this passage it is found in 25:11, "I appeal to Caesar." It sets the direction for the rest of the book and shows how Paul reached Rome. Remember what God told Paul the night after he stood before the Sanhedrin and divided them with "It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial" (Acts 23:11). Felix had kept Paul around for two years and conversed with him often (Acts 23:26-27). Festus had replaced Felix as procurator of Judea and held that office from A.D. 60-62, when he died.

ESV ¹ ¶ **Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ² And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, ³ asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem-- because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.**

Festus was new in that position. The chief priests and others had kept up their bitterness against Paul for the last two years (see Eph. 4:26-27; Heb. 12:15). The high priest when Festus took office was Ishmael whom Herod Agrippa II appointed to succeed Ananias during the final days of Felix's governorship. Ananias however continued to exercise a dominant role in Jerusalem affairs right up to his death in A.D. 66 at the hands of Jewish nationalists. They knew that their case against Paul was so weak that the only way they could get rid of him was by an ambush. They obviously didn't tell Festus that they were planning on ambushing Paul. Don't miss a very important detail. They asked Festus for a favor. They were counting on the new governor's inexperience and were asking him to bend Roman law in their favor. This was meant to appeal to the new procurator's desire to establish a good working relationship with the Jewish leaders.

⁴ **Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. ⁵ "So," said he, "let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him."**

Unwittingly Festus overturned their plans.

⁶ ¶ **After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷ When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. ⁸ Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense."**

Their charges were also made with great emotion (Acts 25:24). The word translated "shouting" there is one of those words for which you can hear their shouts by just pronouncing it (*βοᾶω* bo-a'-o). Paul argued that their charges were without merit, evidently making some headway with Festus. The impasse remained.

⁹ But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?"

Festus was looking for a suitable compromise to placate Paul's Jewish accusers. Paul knew that if he were to agree to this it would be tantamount to delivering himself over to the Jews.

^{10a} But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried.

Their charges had included both political sedition and profaning the temple, the first of which called for the Roman death penalty, the second of which called for the Jewish death penalty. Paul would have had in mind the previous attempt to ambush and kill him (23:12-22). The possibility of a fair trial in Jerusalem was remote. Besides this Paul knew that if he was able to make it to Jerusalem safely the Jewish authorities would exert every pressure on Festus to have Paul turned over to them for trial on the charge of profaning the temple... a charge for which they had to right to impose the death penalty.

^{10b} To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. ¹¹ If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar."

This was Paul's right under Roman law. Roman law protected Roman citizens at this time who invoked the right of *provocatio ad Caesarem* (appeal to the emperor) from violent coercion and capital trials by provincial administrators. Note that it was Nero who reigned from A.D. 54-68. But these were the early years of Nero's rule with little that would have warned what was coming in the last five years of his life.

¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go." ¹³ ¶ Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus.

Agrippa II was son of Herod Agrippa I who had James killed, who intended to kill Peter, and who was eaten by worms and died.¹ Agrippa II was also the great-grandson of Herod the Great who had the temple mound expanded, built the temple, and later had the infant boys killed in and around Bethlehem. Because he was a friend of the Roman imperial family he was awarded the privilege of appointing the Jewish high priest and also had been made custodian of the temple treasury. He was well acquainted with the Jewish religion.

¹⁴ And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, ¹⁵ and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. ¹⁶ I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. ¹⁷ So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. ¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. ¹⁹ Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. ²⁰ Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. ²¹ But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." ²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him."

Did you see God's hand through this.

It is in God we trust!

¹ Acts 12.