

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

PART TWENTY-SIX - CHAPTERS 25 and 26

While the previous governor, Felix, was a diplomat who dithered between corruption and Christ and eventually did nothing, the new governor, Festus was a man who got things done. Only three days after arriving in the country to take up his new post, he was visiting Jerusalem, the chief trouble spot. The religious leaders had not forgotten about their old enemy, Paul, even after two years. The old plan to kill him on his way to trial in Jerusalem was revived, although the 40 men who had vowed to fast till they had killed Paul were presumably not still hungry! Jealousy has a long memory. Festus while determined to act fast on outstanding issues was going to do so on his terms to show who was in charge. In less than two weeks Paul's case was re-opened in Caesarea. (25:1-6)

The Jewish leaders' hatred of Paul had produced an even longer list of imaginary charges against him for which they obviously had no evidence. (25:7) Paul pleaded not guilty to all charges without elaborating. (25:8) Festus' haste to get action, to prove he was the boss but at the same time establish a relationship with those he ruled which would make them indebted to him, got him into trouble. Paul was aware of the previous plot against him in Jerusalem so he had no intention of being sent back there again only to get killed on the way. God had promised him that he would get to Rome. Now he saw his chance of reaching Rome and eagerly seized it. He exercised his right of appeal as a Roman citizen to the Emperor. The Emperor was in Rome - so he was now on his way to fulfil a long time dream - and to die in the process! (25:9-12)

But Festus had a big problem. He was about to send a prisoner on to the Emperor for the case against him to be reviewed by the highest court, but as far as Festus had discovered, there was no case to answer! How could he re-open the case against Paul without losing face? A state visit by Herod Agrippa II and his queen gave him the opportunity to retrieve the situation. This Herod was the son of Herod Agrippa I who killed James the apostle and grandson of Herod Antipas who was king at the time of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. He ruled Galilee under the Emperor as Festus governed Judea. They were equals, each needing to keep on the right side of the same boss. Agrippa had no jurisdiction over Jerusalem and therefore Paul's case, but Festus used him as an excuse to get himself out of an embarrassing situation. It may be that the two men had run out of things to talk about so listening together to Paul could liven up the dinner table. First Festus explained the background to the matter. He summarised the situation accurately identifying exactly the difference between Jews and Christians. The Jews said Jesus was dead; the Christians said He was alive. (25:13-21) Probably to Festus' great relief Agrippa went along with his plan and they agreed to hear Paul together. (25:22)

The following day the hearing took place amid great pomp and ceremony presumably to cover the fact that the whole process was totally illogical. Festus had already decided that the Jews' charges had no substance to them. Paul should as a matter of justice have been set free. The purpose of the hearing was to allow Paul to say something against himself for which he would have to answer before the Emperor! But for Paul what mattered was not justice but the opportunity to testify of the love of God in Jesus to first a king and then an emperor who otherwise would probably never have heard. (25:23-27)

26:1-3 Q.1 What clues did Paul give us in this opening greeting to Agrippa as to his understanding of where the king stood spiritually? Remember that the Herod family were Edomites rather than Jews even though they had been able to rule at least part of Israel for 100 years. What effect had governing the Jews had on him? Why is it important to try to understand where our audience stand before we open our mouths?

26:4,5 Q.2 What information did Paul give about his early life? Why was this account briefer than the one in chapter 22? What would its significance have been to Agrippa?

26:6-8 Q.3 What did Paul claim was the real issue between him and the Jews? Again why would this have been particularly interesting to the king? Give examples in your own experience of the value of choosing carefully what parts of your testimony to give on what occasion?

26:9-12 Q.4 What glimpse did Paul give us into his former campaign against Christians? Where did he say his authority came from? How would this claim be particularly telling before this court?

26:13,14 Q.5 What did Paul see on the road to Damascus? What did he hear? What do you suppose were the 'goads' that Saul had been kicking against? A goad was a sharp instrument jabbed into the back of an ox to make it go faster. The ox could either respond to the goad or fight against it. What memories in particular might have really been convicting Saul in those days when he was persecuting Christians? How do we often see the same process going in people whom God is convicting?

26:15-18 Q.6 When Saul called Jesus 'Lord', did he know to whom he was speaking? Can we assume from his response that he was now a believer in Jesus Christ? What instructions did the Lord give Saul as to his immediate response and future work? How would Paul's words have been a particularly sharp goad to Agrippa? What in just these few words did he tell him about the Christian gospel and life?

26:19-23 Q.7 How had Saul responded to his orders from heaven? Where had his message and authority come from? How did he expand on his explanation of the gospel to Agrippa? Why did he keep emphasising that he had been sent to 'Jewish people and to the Gentiles'? How would this hit home with the king? If Agrippa had wanted later on to check on Paul's message where would he go to do so?

26:24,25 Q.8 What was Festus' reaction to Paul's testimony? What part of Paul's message had particularly affected him? Did he really think Paul was mad? How did Paul respond to being called mad?

26:26-29 Q.9 Why did Paul turn from Festus to Agrippa? How did he recognise the king's spiritual situation to be quite different from the governor's? How can we learn from his example when we are talking to a mixed group of people? How close was Agrippa to becoming a Christian?

26:30-32 Q.10 What should Festus and Agrippa have done at this point? Why didn't they?