

ACTSFACTS

C@G Supplementary Study Notes for ACTS

Message #54

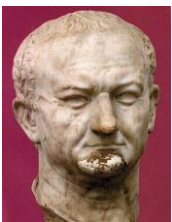
“PAUL ON TRIAL BEFORE FESTUS”

(Acts 25:1-12)



OVERVIEW:

In Acts 25, Luke never mentions the name of God. The hand of God, however, runs throughout the entire narrative. His providential hand orchestrates every event in this chapter. He protects His servant Paul and sets the apostle on a trajectory toward proclaiming the gospel before the most powerful and influential people in the empire. God may seem absent; indeed, it may seem that God has abandoned Paul. His grace, however, continues to empower Paul and give him the wisdom and strength to meet his adversaries with poise, peace and conviction. The promise of God in 23:11 directs and undergirds the entire narrative. God's promises will never fail.



A Change of Roman Governors in Judea

Felix was a brutal, corrupt and ruthless governor. He left Paul languishing in custody in Caesarea, always hoping for a bribe to set him free. This, of course, never eventuated. History tells us that after ruthlessly subduing a riot in Caesarea, a delegation of Jews went to Rome and complained before Emperor Nero about the governor and his actions. Nero recalled Felix in disgrace and appointed Porcius Festus to replace him.

Festus seems to have been an excellent governor, much better than Felix, or those who followed him in the office of governor. Sadly, he died after just two years in office. However, in this short period of time, Festus became a key player in the unfolding story of Paul's continuing story and, ultimately, of his journey to Rome.

After taking only three days to settle in as the Governor of Judea, Festus travels to Jerusalem to meet the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders had spent two years nursing and nurturing their hatred against Paul and saw this as an opportunity to take advantage of. They requested Festus to send Paul to Jerusalem. Their intent, as Luke tells us in 25:3 was not to have Paul arrive in Jerusalem, but to ambush and kill him on the way. Festus doesn't see the reason of this as Paul is still in Caesarea and he (Festus) is going back there. So he tells the Jewish leaders they need to come to Caesarea if they wish to pursue their charges against Paul.

So, about ten days later, Festus convenes a court at which the Jewish leaders (Sanhedrin) are invited to present their accusations against Paul. It would seem, according to Luke's account, that the Jews did not have anything new to present to the court.

The charges that they had initially brought before Felix (sedition, sectarianism and sacrilege) in Acts 24 were serious, but they could not prove them then. And now, two years later, they are still presenting the same accusations before Festus and still without any proof.

And, again, Paul refutes each charge, denying that he has breached Roman, Jewish, or God's law. Stalemate.

Why does Festus then suggest that Paul go back top Jerusalem to be on trial (25:9)?

How does Paul respond to this idea (25:10)-11? And what do you think of this response?

Paul stands up for his rights. Would it not have been more Christian to agree to Festus' request?

When is it "wrong" to turn the other cheek? What kinds of issues should we stand up and fight for?

What can you learn from Paul's behaviour and response in the face of hateful accusations?

Festus, of course, can find no guilt in Paul regarding these accusations. He is probably quite perplexed over the reasons the Jews hate Paul so much. The Jews view Jesus (the One whom Paul represents) as a great scandal which disrupts their entire religious culture. Whereas for the Romans, the tale of Jesus only leads to confusion.

So, Paul, decides to invoke his privilege as a Roman citizen to have his trial held before the highest authority in the Empire.....before Caesar himself!....."I appeal to Caesar!"

This appeal immediately takes the matter out of the governor's hands and away from the Jewish authorities. It sets in motion the legal machinery that would finally take Paul to Rome, fulfilling the promise of God, and his own desire, to declare the gospel in the hub of the ancient world – Rome.

In this chapter we see, once again, the sovereign authority of God and His providential protection of Paul.

Are you aware of times when God has over-ruled in your life? Or, in looking back, can you think of cases where God was at work and you were not aware of it?

Can God use non-Christians to get His will done? If yes, can you think of any biblical examples?

HATRED

The Jews were filled with hatred against Paul. Why? Paul was hated because of his love and obedience to Christ. The hatred the Sanhedrin had for Paul was, in reality, Satan's hatred for Jesus. Paul represented Jesus and was, therefore, a target for Satan's hatred.

Look up, and summarize in your own words, what Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:22 and John 15:18-25.

Ephesians 4:31 lists many examples, or aspects, of hatred. Have you ever felt any of these things against someone else, yourself? How did you deal with it...if you have?

Ephesians 4:32 is the antidote to poisonous attitudes / relationships. Is it easy to apply? Why/why not?

PERSONAL PROJECT:

Make a list of 10 people in your life who do not know and follow Jesus.

Next to each name describe, as best as you can, what is keeping them from Jesus. What are ways that you can serve them, get to know them better or spend time with them? Ask God to give you His heart for each of them and to work in their hearts and yours – that you might share the gospel with them.