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THE TWO WAYS OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

CHAPTER 11

THE FINAL OUTCOME

"Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doeth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost (in a little or with a little) thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Acts 26:24-28

The last four and a half chapters of Acts deal with events while Paul is in the custody of the Roman authority, first in Caesarea and then in Rome. The first part of Acts 23 tells us how certain death awaited Paul in Jerusalem had not Claudius Lysias, the chief captain of the Roman guard, been informed by Paul's nephew of the plot to kill Paul. We are told that forty Jews, of unknown character and affiliation, bound themselves with an oath to kill Paul and would do so before they ate or drank anything again. They were obviously intent upon killing Paul at the first possible opportunity. Acts 23:14 shows clearly that they were in conspiracy with the High Priest and the Sanhedrin.

It is not clear who these forty men were. We do not know if they were Pharisees, Saducees, Essenes, Zealots, Christians or non-Christians. We do know from the context that they had access to the High Priest and the Sanhedrin and from that fact we can conclude that they were not mere peasants. It also seems clear that they were not hired by the High Priest or Sanhedrin to kill Paul since they initiated the conspiracy to have Paul brought out in the open where he could be conveniently killed. They were hardly "lewd fellows of the baser sort" as in Acts 17:5, or "false witnesses" as in Acts 6:13.

Had Luke told us more fully who these men were, and who they were affiliated with, our picture of affairs in Jerusalem would undoubtedly be clearer. We cannot necessarily conclude that Luke omitted telling us who they were because such details were unimportant. It is equally likely that it would have been "imprudent" for him to have done so, especially if the forty men were among the "many tens of thousands of Jews that believe and are all zealous for the law". Since Paul was delivered from them, it is likely that they starved to death since they appear to be very devout Jews and had revealed their "great curse" to the High Priest and Sanhedrin (Acts 23:14). It seems that their hatred of Paul was born out of religious zeal rather than motivated by bribes or to win favor with the authorities. If so, they could hardly have gone back on their "great curse". If they did go back on it, their shame would have been difficult to live with.

Luke also does not tell us how Paul's nephew found out about the plot so that he could tell Paul about it and then tell Claudius Lysias. It is another piece of information that might tell us much of the state of affairs in Jerusalem at the time. If someone from the Sanhedrin told Paul's nephew of the plot, either because he sided with Paul or because he thought the action unjust, we would see one picture. However, if the knowledge of the plot was so widespread that Paul's nephew found out "accidentally", we would see an entirely different picture. We do get some idea of how important Claudius Lysias felt the information to be by the fact that he charged Paul's nephew to "see thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these

things to me" (Acts 23:22) and by the fact that he immediately ordered four hundred seventy soldiers to get ready to take Paul to Caesarea and had them take him there in the middle of the night (Acts 23:23-33).

We cannot help, even at the risk of belaboring the point, to draw attention to the fact that Luke devotes nearly a third of the book of Acts to the events surrounding Paul's going to Jerusalem, his reception while there, and the consequences of his going. Why he does so is a question that begs for an answer. From the first part of Luke's account of "Paul's Jerusalem trip" we see that virtually everyone Paul met and was associated with pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Luke then devotes almost three full chapters to events in Jerusalem while Paul was there, almost as much space as he devotes to the Ascension, the start of the church age, the growth of the church in perhaps the first two years of the church age, and the healing of the man that was lame from his birth, all put together. Such facts point to the possibility, mentioned in the last chapter, that the book of Acts could well have been written with the immediate purpose being to help Paul in his appeal before Caesar.

The Silence of the Jerusalem Church

There are some striking things to consider about Luke's record of Paul's final stay in Jerusalem. After being told that Paul and his company were "received gladly" by "the brethren" (Acts 21:17) and that, after Paul told James and "all the elders" what God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry, "they glorified the Lord" (Acts 21:18-20), we find no further mention of the Jerusalem church acting or responding in any way while Paul is there. We are not told that the church met together and prayed, as Luke points out in Acts 4:23-31 (about 23 years earlier), or as we see in Acts 12:12-17 (perhaps 12 years earlier). We are not told that James or any of the elders interceded on Paul's behalf. The only thing Luke tells us about the Jerusalem church is that James gives Paul instructions to be carried out so that all would see that Paul walked orderly and kept the law, and James tells Paul that there are tens of thousands of Jews in Jerusalem that believe and have been "informed" about him (Acts 21:20-25). James clearly implies that these Christian Jews did not think well of Paul.

From what we have already discussed of Paul's experience in Jerusalem, the "backdrop" of such a large number of Christians in Jerusalem cannot be ignored. If Paul was so hated in Jerusalem, why was not James hated? Why were not the elders in the Jerusalem church hated? How could such hatred of Paul be allowed to dominate the city when many tens of thousands of Christians were there? And, where were the apostles, and especially Peter and John, while all the attacks on Paul were going on? Since Luke does not mention any of the apostles in this account, we assume they were no longer in Jerusalem. If so, why were they not there if many tens of thousands of Christians were there? How and when were they driven out of Jerusalem, if indeed they were forced out? When Paul tells us in Galatians that Peter was afraid of James, was that situation ever rectified? These are serious questions that require serious consideration. The answers to all these questions seem to be centered in James statement of Acts 21:20, "and they are all zealous of the law."

Because the possibility that James, the brother of Jesus, was the opposite of Paul is so revolutionary a concept, I can hardly go further than to show the evidence in Acts that such was the case. A thorough investigation of the epistle of James as contrasted to Paul's epistles and to those of Peter and John must come later. However, there is a verse in James that I used to think was not James' position at all but rather a quote he used to draw a contrast and somehow he felt the opposite. I bring it up here because it is so clear and because it makes James position emphatic when he said to Paul that tens of thousands of Christians in Jerusalem were "zealous for the law". The verse is James 2:10, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all". If this is the position of James, and try as hard as we might, we cannot ignore this verse, then James is clearly opposite to Paul and the silence of James and the Jerusalem church while Paul was in Jerusalem is explained. Regarding the law, James says, "Guilty". Paul says, "Not Guilty". As for the book of James, it is my hope that further examination of it will amplify grace by the contrast it provides, since the epistle of James can hardly be made to correspond to grace but rather corresponds to law.

The Trial Before Felix

When Claudius Lysias has Paul delivered to the governor of Judea, Felix, he also sends a letter to him explaining the situation (Acts 23:26-30). He concludes that Paul has merely been accused of "questions of their law" and he has discovered nothing that would give cause for Paul to be imprisoned, let alone executed. While all the city of Jerusalem screamed "Guilty!", the chief captain of the Roman guard wrote to the governor, "Not Guilty!".

It cannot be emphasized enough that Paul had done nothing wrong regarding the law while in Jerusalem, or for that matter throughout his entire ministry. As he had said before the Sanhedrin, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). This was no man that used grace as an occasion for the flesh or as an occasion to sin. Concerning the law, he was blameless. How many men can say that today? Paul must have lived a very contented life (and we won't mention for the moment the beatings, stonings, starvation, etc.). To be able to say, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" is something rather awesome to consider. And, for this kind of man to be so hated in Jerusalem is even more awesome to consider.

How many people today, given the evidence in Acts 22 and 23, would conclude that Paul was innocent? We can hear the whispers and echos carried on the wind, "Where there is smoke there is fire!", "They couldn't all be wrong!", "Who does he think he is anyway?", "If he's so smart, why ain't he rich?", "I knew he'd get in trouble!". How easy it is to side with the majority, and how wonderfully safe. The heart just swells with self-satisfaction at "being on the winning team". The shoulders go back a little bit, the head comes up, the chin sticks out and pride shows all over to think we're in the majority and therefore we are right! If I had to venture a guess, I'd say there probably isn't one in a hundred today, if placed in Jerusalem when Paul was there, that would side with Paul. Far easier it is to weigh the size of the crowd with the eyes than to weigh the truth with the heart. And yet Paul could say, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

Even Claudius Lysias, that Roman "pillar of objectivity", couldn't resist the opportunity to cover his own complicity by lying a little. His eyes had also weighed the crowd and had concluded that Paul was guilty. So, Claudius saw no harm in having him beaten to get a confession out of him. But after he realized he had made a big mistake, he wrote to Felix and said, "This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman" (Acts 23:27).

If the actions of Claudius Lysias were not so typical of human nature, we'd be inclined to say to him, "Oh, come on Claudius, don't go telling tales out of school. You know you had Paul beaten before you found out he was a Roman." Anyway, seems to me that he took some risk in lying to the governor. Perhaps he felt it was less of a risk than the governor finding out he had beaten a Roman citizen. Certainly it would go hard on any of his soldiers if they told the governor Claudius had lied (and probably the governor would not have believed them anyway).

Five days after Paul was escorted out of Jerusalem, Ananias and the Sanhedrin descended on Caesarea and brought with them their "hired gun", Tertullus. Assumably, Tertullus was the best of his trade and well versed in Roman law and "well connected". He starts his prosecution by saying to Felix, "we have found this man a pestilent fellow" (Acts 24:5), or as Moffatt translates the verse, "The fact is, we have found this man a perfect pest." The Christian who has read and studied Paul's epistles can't help but see how ludicrous this statement is. A man, called by Jesus Christ Himself, is considered a "pest" by the High Priest and the Sanhedrin of Israel.

The formal charges are three in number. First, Paul is charged with sedition. Second, he is charged with being "a ringleader" of the Nazarene sect. Third, he is charged with "trying to desecrate the Temple". Acts 24:9 says, "and the Jews assented, saying that these things were so." We can imagine them nodding their heads and saying, "Yep, you betcha, Paul did all that!"

Paul then responds by pointing out that it was only twelve days prior that he went up to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 24:11). If we consider that the first day he was greeted by the church, the second day he

met with James, five days had passed since he arrived in Caesarea, and two days passed after the day he met with the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem before he was escorted out of Jerusalem, we are left with only four days in which Paul could possibly have been "a pest". During those four days he had to purify himself with the four men of Acts 21:23, and "be at charges with them". Also, the fourth day was the day of the riot when he was almost killed, and we are left with very little time in which he could have been "a Pest". The time frame would not have been lost on Felix (even though he goes down in history as a man that "in the practice of all kinds of lust and cruelty he exercised the power of a king with the temper of a slave").

Paul then denies that he did anything wrong in Jerusalem and points out that his accusers cannot prove any of their charges (as should have been obvious to Felix by the fact that they brought no witnesses with them). It is interesting to note the difference between their charge here that Paul "tried to desecrate the Temple" (Acts 24:6 Moffatt) and the hew and cry in Jerusalem that he "brought Greeks also into the Temple, and hath polluted this holy place" (Acts 21:28). We can't help but think that Felix was wondering who were the bigger "pests", Paul or the High Priest and his company. Paul goes on to say that he came to Jerusalem after many years absence "to bring alms to my nation, and offerings" (Acts 24:17). This "rang bells" in the mind of Felix as evidenced by his later treatment of Paul and Luke's statement, "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul" (Acts 24:26). Perhaps Luke knew this fact from himself being approached by Felix.

Perhaps the most revealing fact about Paul's trial before Felix is Luke's comment that Felix had "more perfect knowledge of that way" or as Moffatt puts it, "Felix had a rather accurate knowledge of the Way". Knoch says, "being acquainted more exactly with that which concerns the way." The fact that the Roman governor of Judea had an extensive and accurate knowledge of Christianity says much about how extensive Christianity was. Luke even tells us that Felix and his wife Drusilla, sent for Paul later "and heard him concerning the faith in Christ" (Acts 24:24). We are not told whether or not they were "born again". We hope they were! We do see in verse twenty five that Felix became afraid when Paul brought up the subject of righteousness, self-control, and impending judgment. We are also told that Felix hoped to get money for Paul's release which presumably is the reason he kept him imprisoned for two years. We are told that Felix conversed with Paul "pretty frequently" (Acts 24:26 Moffatt).

Most everyone seems to think that Felix was a "bad guy" because he hoped to get money from Paul. Historians don't have much good to say about him either. Some suggest that he wasn't very qualified and only had his office because his brother Paulus was influential in Rome. Others point out that he had Jonathan, one of the High Priests, assassinated because he protested against some of Felix's practices. It is even recorded that he enticed his wife away from her husband with the help of a magician. All these point to the probability that he wasn't much of a "sterling fellow", at least for part of his life.

However, a case can be made in his defense. It is possible that the money he wanted from Paul was the payment of a fine rather than a bribe. As the governor, Felix had a volatile situation on his hands. (It was only about six years later that the daily sacrifice for Caesar was stopped, thereby starting the war that ended with the destruction of Jerusalem). If he found Paul innocent and let him go, he might have been faced with severely unpleasant political consequences. If however, he could get Paul to pay a fine and thereby admit his guilt, he could conceivably accomplish his purpose in letting Paul go while at the same time pacifying the situation in Judea.

We bring up this possibility to show that it was at least as likely that Felix and his wife did become Christians, after talking with Paul "pretty often", as it was that they did not become Christian. Certainly their background was no worse than Paul's, Paul having killed Christians. And, from the vantage point of God's grace, we'd have to say, "Why, that would be just like God to give eternal life to Felix and Drusilla". Luke does say that Felix and Drusilla "heard him concerning the faith of Christ" and also says Felix later sent for Paul often and "communed with him". And, such conversations can hardly be relegated to talk about the weather when we consider the fact that Paul's ministry was to Jews, Gentiles and Kings and also that Felix was the Roman governor.

One other point in favor of Felix. Historians tell us that he was removed from office because the Jewish

nation was dissatisfied with him and appealed to Rome to have him removed. Although there does not seem to be any evidence outside of Acts for the position that Paul's being under the protection of Felix was the cause for Felix' removal from office, the evidence that Acts does contain seems to overshadow any other "secular" evidence, especially if Felix and his wife became Christians. In that case, Paul would have grown in the minds of the High Priest and his cronies from a "pest" to a "prehistoric monster"! And, grace would once again have triumphed over law!

We should mention also, that regardless of whether or not Felix was converted, Caeserea became Paul's "headquarters" for two years and the centurion that kept Paul was instructed to "let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him" (Acts 24:23). Paul's status seems similar to his later two years imprisonment in Rome where we see that he "received all that came in unto him. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:30-31). We can't help but wonder how many people heard the gospel in Caeserea during those two years. Paul did mighty things in much less time in other cities of the world. He hadn't changed, even if Jerusalem had changed for the worse.

Paul's Trial Before Festus

The evidence that Paul was the cause for Felix being removed from office continues in Acts 25:1. From the time that Festus arrived in Judea, only three days went by before he went to Jerusalem and was informed of the Jews position against Paul. We are told that after Festus was "informed" the Jews "besought him, and desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him" (Acts 25:2-3). Knoch translates verse three, "and they entreated him, requesting a favor against him, so that he should send after him to bring him into Jerusalem, making an ambush to assassinate him by the way."

The way the verse reads seems to suggest that the High Priest and the "chief of the Jews" were being "out front" with Festus and basically saying, "Do us a favor. Send for Paul and we'll kill him on the way to Jerusalem. It will solve a big problem." It could be that they didn't tell Festus about their plans to assassinate Paul, but the verse seems to suggest that they did. If Paul was the reason for Felix being dismissed, then Festus would have known that Paul was "the first thing on his list" when he took office. In any event, Festus declines their request and says that he will go up to Caeserea shortly and they should bring all their "ammunition" with them and the matter of Paul would be addressed then.

The King James Version translates Acts 25:6 by saying that Festus stayed with them in Jerusalem "more than ten days". Knoch and Moffatt both say "not more than eight or ten days". The difference in the translations may not be critical. However, if "not more than eight or ten days" is more accurate, then an urgency is implied that is missing in the King James. If Festus had only three days to organize affairs in Caeserea and then only eight to ten days to do the same in Jerusalem, then the trial of Paul was indeed on the "front burner". The day after he arrived back in Caeserea, he had Paul brought before him. When we realize that Festus only stayed in Caeserea three days (about the time needed to unpack), went up to Jerusalem for eight to ten days and then immediately put Paul on trial upon his return back to Caeserea, it becomes fairly clear that Paul was "the first order of business". If so, there is every reason to believe that Paul was the cause of Felix being dismissed and the likelihood that Felix became a Christian increases.

Acts 25:5 is revealing when Festus says to the High Priest and the "chief of the Jews", "Let them therefore, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him." The fact that Festus had the High Priest and his company travel "with him" certainly puts him "in bed with them". Verse seven tells us that "the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and greivous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove." We can picture the High Priest and his crew mulling over accusations for two years time and probably even had in their "many and greivous complaints" that Paul didn't wash his hands when he ate bread, or "he sneezed last thursday". When we consider the almost infinite possibilities for accusations that could be developed by "devout" Jews over two years time, especially when they hated someone as much as they hated Paul, we can well imagine how long they "stood round about" heaping one accusation on top of another. We can

almost picture Luke with tongue in cheek saying, "Oh, by the way, none of these are true."

Luke only dedicates one verse to Paul's defense. Paul says, "Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the Temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended anything at all" (Acts 25:8). Paul certainly knew what he was up against. He spends little time on his defense, one sentence. Since he was "at liberty" under the centurion's protection for the two years he was in Caesarea, he might even have had agents sitting around the coffee shops in Jerusalem, gathering the latest "inside information" as they appeared to be idly sipping their coffee. It is also likely that Paul knew the reasons for the dismissal of Felix, especially if Felix had become a Christian.

In any event, Acts 25:9 shows the trap that Festus has set for Paul. Festus says, "Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?" Many historians say that Festus was a better man than Felix. If so, they didn't get their information from Acts. This verse shows him to be a perfect creep! And, if it is true that the High Priest and his people were "out front" with Festus while he was in Jerusalem and he knew and sanctioned their plan to assassinate Paul on the way to Jerusalem, then he must be seen here as the worst kind of man possible, a conniving, treacherous, waste of a man. We are told that he was "willing to do the Jews a pleasure" (Acts 25:9), and it is obvious that he could have cared less for Paul's safety or wellbeing. If nothing else could be said about his predecessor, Felix, at least Felix kept Paul safe for two years. Festus is in Israel for less than two weeks and tries to get Paul to consent to going up to Jerusalem.

Paul replied, "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"(Acts 25:10). The fact that Paul says, "as thou very well knowest" makes the entire scene very clear. In the next verse, Paul reminds Festus that he did not have the power to deliver Paul to the Jews. For Paul to talk this way to Festus, there must have been a whole lot of attention being paid to the matter, not only in Jerusalem but also in Rome. Otherwise, we cannot imagine Paul pointing out the governor's limitations to Festus. A free man would hardly dare to do such a thing, let alone a prisoner. However, Paul knew he would be judged by hate in Jerusalem rather than by law and was not about to let Festus transfer the case from Roman Jurisdiction to the jurisdiction of the High Priest and Sanhedrin, even though Festus assured Paul that he would hear the case himself in Jerusalem. The attempt by Festus to get Paul to agree to move the trial to Jerusalem can be seen in no other way than that Festus was willing to do the Jews a favor.

Paul completes his part of the meeting by saying, "I appeal unto Caesar" (Acts 25:11). The following verse says that Festus "conferred with the council" and we can well imagine the "expletives deleted" that they all tossed at each other. There was nothing that any of them could do, including Festus. Festus tells Paul, "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go."

It should be pointed out that Festus could have released Paul since there was no evidence against Paul. The fact that he did not, shows that no longer was there any pretense of justice. Paul was faced with a raw power struggle. The Jews and Festus were on one side with all their money and political clout. Paul was on the other with only a right to appeal to Caesar (and of course, Jesus Christ having all power and authority in heaven and in earth).

Paul's Audience Before King Agrippa

As was the case with Claudius Lysias' letter to Felix, so also Festus failed to tell the "whole story" to King Agrippa when The King of the Jews came to Caesarea to welcome Festus into office. The complicity of Festus with the High Priest is omitted. His desire to do them a favor is omitted. He indicates that he was surprised by the accusations against Paul (but failed to tell him that he had spent eight or ten days with the Jews in Jerusalem and traveled back with them to Caesarea). He then tells Agrippa that the questions were over some fellow named Jesus, who died and yet Paul affirmed that He was alive. Festus then tells Agrippa, in a very innocent light, that he asked Paul to go to Jerusalem. He clearly did not wish to inform Agrippa that he was "willing to do the Jews a pleasure" (Acts 25:9).

Agrippa tells Festus that he wants to hear Paul himself and Acts 25:23 begins the record of that meeting. It

is truly a revealing account to consider. With all the things that Luke has told us so far about the events surrounding Paul's final trip to Jerusalem, this is one clear episode that demonstrates that Paul was surely called to minister to kings.

We are told that "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", Paul was brought before them all. The place of meeting was not the judgment hall, but the "audience chamber" as both Moffatt and Knoch render it. This was King Herod Agrippa II, King of the Jews (son of Agrippa I who had been raised with Claudius, Emperor of Rome and was a personal friend as well as a counselor to him and who, Acts 12 tells us, killed the apostle James, imprisoned Peter, and then was "eaten of worms" and died). Perhaps fourteen years had gone by since his father had died and King Herod Agrippa II reported to no one but to Caesar in Rome. His relationship to Festus was not one of subordinate to superior, but rather was the relationship of a King to a Roman administrator.

This meeting is not a trial at all. It is an audience. There are no accusers, no charges, and no evidence brought forth. There also is no indication that the High Priest or his people were even invited to attend this affair. It is held in a thoroughly Gentile city, by the order of the King of the Jews, and all the Roman military leaders are invited to attend as well as all the leading citizens of the city of Caesarea. This is a big meeting and it is called with the express purpose of hearing Paul. God could not have put together a more Royal forum for Paul to present his case for grace (with the possible exception of his later appearance before Nero). We have seen from previous accounts in Acts that whole cities came together to hear Paul. But, he never came before the King of the Jews before. Many people have missed the tremendous reality of this meeting because they have thought it was a trial. It is not a trial. It is an audience before a king, interested in hearing what Paul has to say, who has called a meeting, and has gathered all the influential people of the city together with him to hear Paul.

After Festus has Paul brought in, he addresses the King and all the rest of the people and says, "ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both in Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer" (Acts 25:24). The picture of Festus standing in front of all those influential people and saying such a thing almost makes us want to have pity on him. He had only been in town a little while and most of the people present must have been unknown to him. There is little doubt that they were mostly, if not all, Gentiles. The picture is a pretty pitiful sight. Festus points at Paul and says, in essence, "You see this man, he has occupied my entire time since I got here. It seems there is not a Jew around that has not shouted, Away with him!"

Festus goes on to tell them that he could find nothing worthy of death in Paul but that since Paul had appealed to Caesar, he had determined to send him. Acts 25:26 shows the state to which Festus had been reduced in his short time in office. He says, "I don't have anything to accuse him of!" Imagine the situation. Festus brings out Paul, tells all these people that the man is thoroughly hated by the Jews, he has appealed to Caesar, Festus concludes he will send him to Caesar, but doesn't have any charges to send with him. It is pitiful! I can imagine the smiles, the guffaws, the whispered questions, "who is this jerk Festus? Why didn't he let the man go? There are not even any charges against him!"

But, Festus blunders on and solicits their help, as well as the help of Agrippa. He says, "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. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him." (Acts 25:26-27). Had we not already seen the kind of character that Festus had shown himself to be, we might feel truly sorry for him, standing in front of such an illustrious crowd with a prisoner and such a ridiculous case. As it is, we want to say, "shut up, fool, and let Paul speak!"

Chapter 26 is the record of Paul's speech before Agrippa and all the influential people of the city of Caesarea. The setting is wonderful, the speech is wonderful and most important of all, the outcome is wonderful. In fact, the outcome is so wonderful that it may be very hard to accept. And, it has been hidden away by virtually every translation and every commentary of which I am familiar. It is one place in

which I will dare to stand against them all without apology and without hesitation. If I am wrong, what follows will hurt no one. If I am right, the grace of God may be seen beyond my wildest expectations.

Paul's speech, and in fact, the rest of the chapter seem clear and easily understandable. In fact the only word in the entire chapter that does not ring true in the context is the word "almost" in Acts 26:28. The Greek word used by Agrippa in verse 28, and by Paul in verse 29, is the word "oligo". It is used elsewhere in the bible, but only here is it translated "almost". Everywhere else it has been translated "in a little", "with a little", "a short space", "briefly", etc..

If we say, as most do, that Agrippa's words were, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" we must conclude that Paul didn't quite persuade him. If, however, Agrippa's words were, "Briefly thou persuadest me to be a Christian", then our conclusion is quite the opposite. We see that Paul did persuade Agrippa to be a Christian. In other words, with Paul's brief explanation, or short message, or "with a little" scripture, King Agrippa did become a Christian. Knoch translates the verse, "Yet Agrippa to Paul, Briefly are you persuading me, to make me a Christian." (And it should be added that even after Knoch so translated the verse, his commentary indicates that it did not dawn on him that Agrippa had become a Christian).

If we leave the verse uncertain for the moment, and consider which is the more likely outcome from the context, much becomes absolutely clear. In verse 24, Festus interrupts Paul in the middle of his presentation. He does so "with a loud voice". This is not Agrippa that is interrupting Paul. It is not the people gathered with Agrippa that are interrupting Paul. It is Festus interrupting Paul, and he does so "with a loud voice". His words match his action. He says, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doeth make thee mad."

We must ask ourselves, "why would Festus take it upon himself to interrupt Paul when Agrippa had given Paul permission to speak?" (See Acts 26:1). If Agrippa had wanted Paul to stop speaking, all he would have had to do was make a gesture with his hand or say "enough". Festus had heard Paul speak before. He had even briefed Agrippa that Paul believed Jesus to be alive (Acts 25:19). Why did he, "with a loud voice" declare that Paul was crazy?

We can only conclude that Festus felt Agrippa was being unduly influenced, or some other nefarious reason. Perhaps he was on the "payroll" of the High Priest and Paul's testimony was getting entirely out of hand. Perhaps he was possessed, like Barjesus in Acts 13:6-12, when Paul was talking to the deputy Sergius Paulus on the island of Paphos. In that event, Sergius Paulus believed and was "astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

Whatever prompted Festus to interrupt Paul, we can be sure that he was not being courteous. There is no evidence that he was asked to interrupt Paul. Paul's response assures Festus that he is not crazy but that he is speaking forth "words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25). Paul then contrasts Festus with Agrippa by saying, "For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). In other words, Paul says that Agrippa understands what Paul is saying even if Festus does not. He also points out to Festus that he was given permission to speak by Agrippa. And, from all that we have discussed so far in Acts, certainly the evidence of Jesus Christ's resurrection was "not done in a corner". From Paul's statement, "I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him," it seems more than likely that King Agrippa also knew about Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus before Paul's audience with him.

The following verse is the verse that hit me like a ton of bricks when it first dawned on me that Agrippa could have been saved that day. Paul says, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I KNOW THAT THOU BELIEVEST!!!" (Acts 26:27). Nothing could be clearer. Paul says that he knows that Agrippa believes. Some will be bound to say that Paul is referring only to an academic interest on the part of Agrippa in the Old Testament. The whole context of Paul's presentation flies in the face of such a position. And, Festus' outrageous outburst puts the counterpoint to the fact that Paul had reached into the heart of Agrippa and Agrippa's next words are, "Paul, you have persuaded me to be a Christian!" It is such an

overwhelming thing to consider that words are inadequate to do the scene justice.

The very next verse gives Paul's response to Agrippa's confession. Paul says, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." (Acts 26:29) Paul uses the exact same word as Agrippa did, "almost" or "oligo", to say that he wished that all the illustrious crowd gathered with Agrippa were "oligo" persuaded to be a Christian as Agrippa was, or persuaded "in a brief time" to be a Christian, as Agrippa was. And, not only that, Paul wished them all to be "altogether such as I am, except these chains." It can't be that Paul was saying, "I wish you all were 'half-Christians' like Agrippa and even better than that, 'full Christians' like I am." It is unfathomable that Paul would be sarcastic to Agrippa at this point. He was even courteous to Festus when Festus was screaming at him. The only satisfactory conclusion is that King Agrippa (and perhaps many of those gathered with him that day) was converted, saved, born again.

The only argument that appears to prevent anyone from believing that King Herod Agrippa II became a Christian is that they don't want him to be a Christian. So very much has been made of Agrippa's "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian", and so very little has been made over the clear evidence that he did become a Christian. After almost two thousand years, it seems about time that Christians rejoice that they have a brother in Christ, King Herod Agrippa II.

Acts 26:30 should also be considered in any evaluation of whether or not Agrippa became a Christian that day. We are told, "And when he (Paul) had thus spoken, the king rose up, and Bernice, and they that sat with them" and the meeting was ended. There is nothing to suggest that Agrippa was angry, or that he gave any response at all to Paul's final wish. We can only conclude that everyone left quietly to ponder over and consider all that Paul had said.

We do not know how many of the people there believed after hearing Paul. We will know when the Lord returns. We can also well imagine that few demonstrations of joy would have been likely in the presence of the king. And, if we are right that King Agrippa said to Paul, "you have persuaded me to be a Christian" what more could have been said at the meeting? Luke's record of the end of the meeting seems to show ample evidence that Paul's message was effective and hearts had been reached with the overwhelming truth that Jesus Christ is Lord.

The final two verses of Acts 26 tell us that Agrippa and his wife found nothing worthy of death or of bonds about Paul and Agrippa even said to Festus that he would have let him go, then and there, had not Paul appealed to Caesar. These certainly are not the words and actions of a King who Paul had insulted. Much more likely, they were the response of a man who, after hearing about Christianity for a long time, had finally accepted Christ after hearing Paul's brief, but thorough message.

There is some question in Acts 26:31 regarding to whom the "they" is referring. If it refers to all the people gathered with King Agrippa, then we see a much larger discussion going on in the city of Caesarea than if "they" refers only to the King and his wife. Knoch's translation says, "And retiring, they spoke with one another, saying that, 'Nothing deserving of death or bonds this man is committing'". It seems obvious that another meeting was not called and since "they" seems to be referring to all the people in the previous verse, Luke seems to be telling us that all the people talked with one another after the meeting and all agreed that Paul's being imprisoned was totally unjust.

The fact that Agrippa then said to Festus, "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar" does not imply that Festus was among those involved in the common discussion around town that Paul was innocent. From what we have seen of Festus' character, we would have to think he would be more inclined to go and hide. And, it is possible that Agrippa's statement to Festus contained some hint that Festus should have let Paul go so that he would not have had to appeal to Caesar.

Certainly, Paul was not the reason for his own confinement. And, unless the "machinery had already been set in motion" regarding his appeal to Caesar and he could not do so, certainly Paul would have preferred to be released rather than insist on an appeal. It is true that the High Priest and Festus would be in trouble if Paul appeared before Caesar without any charges against him. Roman law was not so short sighted as to

let false accusers go unpunished, especially if they were wasting Caesar's time. However, we cannot imagine that Paul was responsible for his failure to be released as is implied by the statement of Agrippa that he could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar. In any event, it seems clear that all the leading people of Caesarea, as well as King Agrippa, pronounced Paul "Not Guilty!"

Paul Goes to Rome

Acts 27 tells us of Paul being sent to Rome for his appeal. Some will point out that it was Paul's own fault that he was imprisoned for so long because he should not have gone to Jerusalem in the first place. Granted, he could have avoided almost five years of imprisonment if he had not gone to Jerusalem. But, it certainly was not Paul's fault that he was imprisoned. The chief captain of the Roman army at Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias, pronounced Paul, not guilty (Acts 23:29). Felix evidently found him not guilty (Acts 24:22,27). Agrippa found him not guilty (Acts 26:31) as did the whole city of Caesarea. It is obvious that Paul was, in fact, not guilty. Only the hate emanating from Jerusalem keep him confined.

No clearer picture of the difference between Paul and James could be drawn than that drawn by Luke in his extensive account of Paul's final trip to Jerusalem. While Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, James and tens of thousands of Christians were in Jerusalem. And, if Josephus can be believed at all, his account of James' assassination (about the time that Acts ends and presumably Paul appears before Nero, in 62 A.D.) tells us that James was held in honor by "the most equitable of the citizens". We find it odd that Josephus fails to mention anything about Paul in the light of Luke's extensive description of the controversy caused by Paul going to Jerusalem. Josephus was evidently there at the time and seems to be familiar with James reputation in Jerusalem. Also, it should be noted that Josephus wrote about 30 years after Acts was published and certainly he could have had access to Acts if he had chosen to read it.

Josephus also tells us that he was an aristocratic priest, on intimate terms with the High Priest and the elders of the city, which make it implausible that he did not know about Paul. His speaking well about James, and not speaking at all about Paul certainly shows a difference between Paul and James. Historians also point out that Agrippa had the High Priest removed because of the assassination of James, in order to assure the new governor when he arrived that the act of assassinating James was not a lawful act and not sanctioned by him. And, the fact that "those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were uneasy at the breach of laws, they disliked what was done" as Josephus says about James death, would hardly have been said about Paul had he been killed in Jerusalem.

We are told in Acts 27:1 that Paul and other prisoners were delivered to a centurion named Julius for delivery to Rome. There is some evidence that Julius later became Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, second only to Caesar in power. If so, the implication is that the person selected to take Paul to Rome was not lightly made. Also, when the soldiers council was to kill the prisoners (after the shipwreck of Acts 27:41), we are told that the centurion kept them from their purpose because he was "willing to save Paul" (Acts 27:42,43). In Acts 27:3 we are told that Julius "courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself." All indications point to the direction that Julius was given special orders regarding Paul and we can't help but think that Agrippa was in the background somewhere with a concern for Paul's care on the trip to Rome. Even in Rome, when the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard, special arrangements were made for Paul to live in his own quarters and to be able to receive any people that wanted to see him (Acts 28:16).

The account of Paul's voyage and shipwreck, recorded in Acts 27 and 28, shows clearly that God had not forsaken Paul. On the contrary, the miracles and healing recorded, as well as the wisdom given to Paul that saved the lives of all on board ship, (276 people, Acts 27:37) tell us that Paul's ministry continued unabated. On the Island of Melita, the father of the chief of the island was healed, and when the news spread, others came and were healed. Paul was even bitten by a poisonous snake that should have killed him, but didn't. We can imagine how all these events allowed Paul the opportunity to boldly proclaim the Word of God. And, they seem typical rather than exceptional. II Cor. 11:25 tells us that Paul was shipwrecked three times, and we can only imagine the miracles surrounding the other two times in the light of the one we learn about in Acts. When Paul finally arrived at Puteoli (Acts 28:13), on the bay of

Naples, he was greeted by Christians and stayed with them for seven days. When he arrived in Rome, he was also greeted by Christians.

All in all, we see that Christianity was indeed spread all over the world by the time that thirty years or so had gone by from the the first day of the church age. What Luke starts off in Jerusalem, he ends up with in Rome. Signs, miracles, wonders, massive conversions, are woven through Acts like gold thread. Jerusalem, and the many tens of thousands of Christians in it, who were zealous for the law, went to war with Rome. They lost that war and Jerusalem and the Jerusalem church were no more. They had driven Paul out of town by their hatred of him and were in turn consumed.

In Rome, Paul called the chief men of the Jews together and reviewed his case with them. A day was set for him to explain Jesus Christ to them and he did so "from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23). Some believed and some did not believe. When they could not reach agreement among themselves, Paul brought their attention to the prophet Isaiah in one final effort to turn them from their stiff-necked ways. "'You will hear and hear but never understand, you will see and see but never perceive.' For the heart of this people is obtuse, their ears are heavy of hearing, their eyes they have closed, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they understand with their heart and turn again, for me to cure them." (Acts 28:26-27 Moffatt).

For over thirty years, the Jews had heard and heard. They had seen and seen. There were in Jerusalem "many tens of thousands of Jews who believe" and all of them were "zealous of the law." (Acts 21:20). So also, there must have been, in Rome, multitudes of Jews that believed and were all zealous of the law. They just would not admit that Christianity was as high above Judaism as God was above the law of Moses.

With Paul's last meeting with the Jews, the realization comes clearly into focus that their main concern was to keep the Gentiles under their authority. Paul's final words to them show that he is through with compromise and through with appeasement. His defiant last words to them were not the result of momentary frustration. Paul had attended the Council in Jerusalem eleven years before. He had carried James' "sentence" around to the churches.

Paul had even gone back to Jerusalem against the pleading of those who loved him and against the clear advice from God saying "do not go up to Jerusalem". He had sat in prison for two years in Caesarea because of the hatred of the Jews. He had been almost killed on at least two occasions on the way to Rome and he was through with the whole bunch of them. He had gone way beyond the "first and second admonition" of Titus 3:10. Paul was through with Israel as a nation. They would not hear. And so he said emphatically to them, "Be it known unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that THEY WILL HEAR IT!" (Acts 28:28).

In recording these last words of Paul in Acts to the Jews, Luke shows us that an impasse has been reached between the bondage church of James and the liberty church of Paul. Paul nowhere says that the Jews cannot be saved. His contrast is not between individual Jew and individual Gentile. His contrast is clearly between the nation of Israel and the rest of the nations of the world. And, in the light of the angel telling Paul he must appear before Caesar (Acts 27:24), we can't help but wonder what happened at that meeting and what impact the gospel of grace had on Nero.

Nothing good is generally spoken of Nero. However, just as the Jews in Asia had accused Paul of turning the whole world upside down (Acts 17:6), so also it seems to the Christian that in many instances history books have turned the truth around. Many "good guys" appear to be "bad guys" and many "bad guys" appear good. It would be incredible if Nero turned out to be a "good guy" after all. I know of nothing that points in that direction. But, there seems to be no evidence of Paul's meeting with Caesar and yet we know that Paul did meet with him because the angel told him he would. In the light of Paul "turning the whole world upside down", it seems strange that no such record is evident. But, Paul's final words in Acts, "The salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it" ring true, not only in the first century, but down through every century since then. And, Paul could well have had in mind the chief Gentile of

them all, Nero, when he said, "They will hear it!" Judiasm could no more capture Christianity than the law of Moses could capture God. Jesus Christ was most certainly given "all power in heaven and in earth" and the Jews could not confine Him. He is Lord of all who believe, perhaps even Nero's Lord!



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